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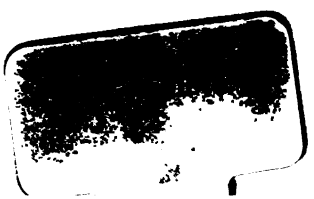

THE CHALLENGE

OF

BARLETTA.

BY

MASSIMO D'AZEGLIO.

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH

BY

LADY LOUISA MAGENIS.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

As the English reader may possibly not be conversant with the history of Italy during that most interesting epoch, the *cinque-cento*, it may be advisable to preface the following romance with a slight sketch of the circumstances which led to the invasion of that country by the French and Spaniards.

The tangled web of Italian politics at that period is indeed hard to unravel; intrigue, plot and counterplot succeeding one another with such bewildering rapidity as almost to baffle our attempts to follow its intricacies. Each petty state, perpetually distracted by internal factions, still further drained its resources by

constant warfare against some rival of which it cherished an inveterate and, in many cases, hereditary jealousy; the usual result of which was that it became enslaved by the soldier of fortune to whom it had entrusted the command of its army. More than one of these mercenaries took advantage of the forces at his disposal to constitute himself tyrant of the city which had enlisted his services, and sought further aggrandisement by allying himself with some potentate as unprincipled as himself; violence and treachery, devised against their weaker neighbours, generally forming the basis of all treaties, which were repudiated without compunction as soon as their end was accomplished; the spoilers invariably falling out over their prey and seeking fresh combinations against their quondam ally.

If we turn to the Holy See in expectation of a higher tone of morality, we are shocked to find prevailing there a still greater state of depravity. The occupant of St. Peter's chair,

at the time of our story, was Alexander VI., whose atrocious crimes, as well as those of his son, the infamous Cesar Borgia, are too notorious to need much comment here. Scandalous in his private life, his public transactions were characterised by unscrupulousness and double-dealing. As practised by him, diplomacy and perfidy might be reckoned synonymous terms. Little more than a puppet, as he was, in the hands of the contending parties, still the prestige of the papal sanction was courted by both of the foreign powers, and the scale into which his influence was alternately thrown was determined by his immediate fears and interests.

It would exceed the due limits of this preface to make more than a passing allusion to the rivalries of Genoa, Pisa, Florence, Milan, Venice, &c., or to enter into the subject of the conflicting claims of the French and Spanish kings on the duchy of Milan and the kingdom of Naples—claims which dated from the times

of the Crusades, and which lay dormant or were revived according as opportunity served to enforce them. It is not surprising that the state of anarchy in Italy, occasioned by its internecine feuds, should have tempted the cupidity of those monarchs, and induced them to lend a ready ear to any appeal for assistance from whatsoever quarter it came.

Fired with a desire for military glory, Charles VIII. of France, soon after his accession, invaded Italy at the head of a large force, with a view of asserting his rights to the kingdom of Naples. He was received with open arms by the Regent of Milan, Ludovico Sforza, surnamed "the Moor," who aimed at supplanting his nephew, just come of age, and married to the daughter of Alonzo, King of Naples. Venice and the rest of Northern Italy remained neutral, while the southern states leagued themselves for defence with the states of the Church and the Tuscan republics.

Pietro de' Medici, chief of the republic of

Florence, after pledging himself to Alfonzo to refuse the French a free passage through its territory, became intimidated by some trifling reverses and surrendered several fortresses to Charles to be garrisoned by the French until his return from Naples. This weakness so enraged the Florentines that, excited by the reforming monk Savanarola, they expelled Pietro from the city; and their magistrates, on the French King's arrival, assumed towards him such a defiant tone as effectually to daunt him: consequently he abated his arrogant pretensions, and treated with them on favourable terms.

Passing onwards, the French army occupied Rome with but trifling opposition; and on its approach to Naples, Alonzo, panic-stricken, abdicated in favour of his son Ferdinand, and the city opened its gates to Charles, who passed there some months in feasting and revelry.

Meanwhile a league was set afoot to secure the independence of Italy, comprising among its members the Pope, King of Spain, Em-

peror Maximilian, Sforza, and the Venetians. As soon as Charles became aware of this confederation he quitted Naples (leaving a viceroy in charge), moved northwards with a great part of his army, gained a great battle at Fornova, and then retired into France. Thereupon the Neapolitans, disgusted with the insolence and rapacity of the French, welcomed back Ferdinand, and, with the assistance of the Spaniards, under Consalvo de Cordova, the French were, within the course of a year, driven from Italy.

On the death of Charles, Louis XII. succeeded to the throne, and immediately set up claims to the duchy of Milan, in right of his grandmother, Valentina Visconti; and having, with the co-operation of the Venetians, succeeded in dispossessing Ludovico (who had removed his nephew out of the way by slow poison), he next turned his attention to Naples. In order to avert any hostile opposition from the Spaniards, he entered into negotiations with them,

and concluded a secret treaty, the terms of which were, that, under colour of joining in a crusade against the Turks, they should jointly occupy the kingdom of Naples and share it between them. Consalvo was again sent with a contingent, which the King of Naples fondly believed was coming to assist him against the French, till his eyes were opened to the treachery practised on him, by the Pope, in full consistory, ratifying this iniquitous compact, while the Spaniards, on landing, proceeded to over-run Calabria, and the French, in concert with the troops of Cesar Borgia, ravaged the northern part of the kingdom, and, taking Capua by assault, pillaged it and massacred its defenders.

But no sooner had the two armies carried out their respective shares of the programme than differences arose between them, in consequence of the loose wording of the partition treaty concerning the lines of demarcation; and it was not long before they came in col-

lision. Consalvo's forces being very inferior to those of the Duc de Nemours, he did not venture to meet the French in the field, but shut himself up in the town of Barletta to await supplies and the arrival of fresh levies.

It is at this point of the war that our tale opens. The two tournays which are the subject of it actually took place as described, and the details of them are historically accurate; the names of the different champions being those of the most notable knights of each host. Suffice it to add, as soon as Consalvo received reinforcements he sallied forth, and early in May justified his title of "the Great Captain" by a signal victory at Ceregnola, where the Duc de Nemours was killed, and again in the following December by the still more decisive one of Garigliano, which completely demoralised the French, who forthwith surrendered Gaeta and retired from the Neapolitan dominions.

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THE CHALLENGE

OR

BARLETTA.

CHAPTER I.

INCOGNITO.

"A sail! a sail! a promised prize to Hope!
Her nation—flag—how speaks the telescope?
No prize, alas!"

Corsair.

At the close of a beautiful April day, in the year 1503, the bell of San Domenico, in Barletta, was pealing forth the last tones of the Ave Maria. At this hour, the piazza near the sea-shore was always thronged with the peaceful inhabitants who, particularly in the little walled towns of southern climes, are in the habit of meeting in the open air to gossip, as a relax-

ation after the business of the day. In accordance with this custom, several Italian and Spanish soldiers were dispersed here and there in clusters; some strolling about, others sitting down or lounging against the boats which had been hauled in high and dry, blocking up the beach: and, as is apt to be the case with the soldiery of every age and nation, their demeanour was such as to convey an assumption of their superiority to the rest of the world. In fact, the townspeople seemed to give a tacit sanction to their haughty airs, by holding aloof and leaving the best places at their disposal.

Anyone trying to imagine this scene by picturing to himself a similar assemblage of our modern soldiers in all the tameness of their rigid uniformity, would be very far from forming anything like a just conception of the *coup d'œil*. Consalvo's troops, although they were not only the best equipped, but in every other respect the best in Christendom, were no more trained than any militia of the sixteenth cen-

tury in the strict school of modern discipline which aims at making one soldier the counterpart of another from head to foot. On the contrary, at that period, every man who followed the profession of arms, whether mounted or on foot, might dress, arm, and adorn himself exactly as he pleased; the result of which was a wonderful variety and charm in the fashion, colours, and general bearing of this crowd, enabling the spectators to determine with ease the nationality of each individual. On the one hand the Spaniards, for the most part serious, impassive, with the deportment of *bravacci*, enveloped, or, as they themselves say, *embozados*, in the national *capa*, from beneath which might be seen protruding the long and delicate Toledo blade. On the other hand the Italians, loquacious and gesticulating, dressed in jerkin or doublet, with a poniard or hanger suspended from the waist.

At the sound of the bell the murmur of voices ceased, all hats were taken off, and most

heads remained uncovered, because in those times even the soldiery believed in God, and occasionally prayed to Him. Hats were resumed after a short pause, and the hum recommenced. Although at first sight the crowd, taken collectively, presented a certain gay and lively aspect, yet it would have been patent to any observer passing to and fro amongst the different groups, that there was some common motive for dejection and discouragement which influenced the minds and words of all alike. And in truth there did exist a real and potent motive. Hunger began to make itself felt both amongst the troops and also the inhabitants of Barletta, to which town the great Captain, while awaiting the tardy auxiliaries of Spain, confined the army, it being too inferior to that of the French for him to risk committing its destinies to the fortune of a single day.

The church, the inn, and sundry poor-looking houses, belonging to sailors and fishermen, composed three sides of the piazza; the fourth

opened on to the *marina*,* which, as usual in such places, was encumbered with boats, nets, and other fishing-tackle. Beyond, just above the horizon, might be seen rising out of the bosom of the waters the dark form of Monte Gargano, on the summit of which still lingered the last ray of the setting sun.

In the intervening roadstead a small ship was quietly sailing, tacking every now and then to catch the wind as it blew in variable gusts across the gulf, ruffling here and there the surface of the sea in long streaks. The distance of the vessel, and the deepening twilight, made it impossible to distinguish her flag.

A Spaniard, standing near the shore with several soldiers, was watching it intently, contracting his brows, and twisting his long grizzly moustaches.

---

* Beach.

"What are you staring at? What makes you stand just like a statue, not attending when you are spoken to?"

This apostrophe from a Neapolitan soldier, who was indignant at receiving no answer to his first question, had not the slightest effect in moving the imperturbable Spaniard. At length, with a sigh which appeared to proceed rather from a pair of bellows than a man's chest, he grumbled:

"*Voto a Dios que nuestra Segnora de Gaeta*, who answers the prayers of *seafarers* with favourable winds and waves, would be graciously pleased to send that galley to us *landsmen*, who are humbly beseeching her to grant us something more toothsome to eat than the butts of our arquebuses! Who can tell that it may not be carrying grain and provisions to those *descomuldagos* of French, who are keeping us cooped up in this cage, trying to starve us to death! *Y mala Pasqua me de Dios y sea la primiera que viniere si su gracia el Segnor*

Gonzalo Hernandez,* when he has himself eaten a good dinner and a still better supper, cares for us one whit more than he does for the *cuero de sus zapatos*."†

"How can Consalvo help it?" testily answered the Neapolitan, who was in a contradictory humour; "would you have him converted into bread to become food for a beast like you? Whenever he has any, he's sure to give it; and I should just like to know about those ships which their evil star carried on to the shoals of Manfredonia. Who devoured their cargo: Consalvo, or you and yours?"

The Spaniard, somewhat discomposed, appeared to be on the point of answering, when he was interrupted by one of the group, who,

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* May the next Easter that comes be an unlucky one for me if his Grace Sir Gonzalo.

† The leather of his shoes.

striking him on the shoulder, shaking his head, and lowering his voice as if to give greater weight to his words, said to him :

" Remember, Nugno ! that the iron of your pike was within three finger-lengths of Consalvo's breast, the day you indulged in that strange freak at Taranto to obtain your arrears of pay. . . . And if ever neck might have expected to make acquaintance with the halter, it was yours on that day ! Don't you recollect, the clamour was enough to frighten a lion ? Is that big tower on the castle moving ? " (and he pointed to the largest tower of the fortress which reared its head above the houses). " Just so much was Consalvo moved ; and, quite coolly, he said (I fancy I can see him now), pushing aside the point with that hairy hand of his : ' Take care, lest you should wound me unintentionally.' "

These reminiscences had the effect of causing the brown face of the old soldier to assume a still duskier hue; and to put an end to a

conversation which was extremely distasteful to him, he cut the other short, saying:

"What do I care about Taranto, the pike, or Consalvo?"

"What do you care? If you give heed to Ruy Perez, and wish to keep a free passage down your throat for bread against the time it pleases God to send us any, you won't talk so loud for Consalvo to hear you and be reminded of Taranto. . . . 'Half a word is too little, and a whole one too much,' says the Italian proverb, and 'A man fore-warned is a man fore-armed.'"

Nugno answered with a certain assumption of swagger which was hardly warranted by the state of his mind. The hint he had received made him feel anxious in spite of himself. He glanced round dubiously, fearful lest some bystander should entertain the idea of denouncing his incautious words. Fortunately this scrutiny proved of a reassuring nature.

The piazza meanwhile had become deserted;

the curfew bell was ringing in the castle; so this group imitated the others, which had already broken up, and dispersed through the narrow and dark streets of the town.

"Diego Garcia will return this evening," said Ruy Perez, as they walked along; "the good lances of his company may have found game in the campagna; and perhaps to-morrow's dinner will be better than to-night's supper."

The emotions engendered by such a prospect put a stop to all further discourse, and each one returned in silence to his own lodging.

During this conversation, the ship, which at first seemed to be proceeding on its voyage, had gradually drawn near the coast. A small boat was lowered, two men jumped in, who quickly rowed towards the strand, and hardly were they off when the larger vessel, all sails spread, got under way, nor was it seen again.

The boat landed in the darkest part of the piazza, and the two rowers sprang ashore. The

first of these strangers, observing that there were no loiterers about, stopped to wait for his companion who remained behind, busily lading himself with a valise and other baggage; having done which, he pulled the boat to the end of a small jetty which served for unloading larger craft, and joined his fellow-passenger who hardly appeared to be his equal in condition, though he assumed an air of arrogant superiority, and said to him, as a conclusion of the dialogue which had been carried on between them as they pulled to land:

"Michele, it is now time to be on your guard; you know who I am, and I have nothing further to say."

Michele fully comprehended the force of these few words; he bowed his head in token of acquiescence, and they bent their steps towards the inn.

In front of the principal entrance of this hostelry, six slender pillars of rough brickwork supported a trellis under which several tables

were set out for the use of customers. The host (whose name was Baccio da Rieti, but who, on account of certain suspicions attached to him, was nicknamed by the populace *Veleno** and was universally so called) had had painted between two windows a great red sun, to which the artist, according to astronomical notions not yet entirely obsolete, had assigned eyes, nose, and mouth, with golden rays disposed like a swallow's tail, and which in the day-time might have been seen a mile off. The interior of the house was divided into two stories. One large room on the basement served as kitchen and dining-room; a wooden staircase communicated with the second floor, on which the landlord lived with his family and any unfortunate wayfarer whose ill fate it was to undergo the discomfort of a night's lodging there.

The common custom in Italy, at that epoch,

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* Poison.

was to dine about an hour before sunset; but at this later period of the evening there were only to be seen, seated at the door in the open air, a few soldiers and troop sergeants, belonging to the company of Signor Prospero Colonna, who followed the fortunes of Spain: all young men full of hardihood, who used to resort thither with other kindred spirits serving in the army. The host, who was well up to his business, plied them with wine and cards, and, being a jovial man, he always had a pleasant joke for everyone, and so contrived to wheedle their money out of them. Veleno was now standing in the passage, fanning himself with his cap, his apron tucked up on one side, and great was the hubbub around.

The two strangers arrived, and, in order not to attract observation as such, strolled leisurely along, often standing still on the pretence of conversing. When they stopped in front of the entrance, and the light from the hearth within fell on their faces, they appeared

neither better nor worse dressed than any of the rest of the company, who paid very little attention to them as they entered, with the exception of one soldier, who, sitting further off and being more in the shade, had a better view of them, and, with an exclamation of "Oh!" in accents of profound astonishment, ejaculated, half rising, "The duke!" The tone in which these words were pronounced showed that they would have been followed by a name, had not a slight glance from one of the new comers sufficed to check its utterance. No one remarked the soldier's dismay, but one of his comrades, who was sitting beside him, said:

"What duke are you dreaming about, Boscherino? Anyone would suppose you had been drinking. Do you think this looks much like a place for dukes?"

Boscherino was only too thankful not to be credited, but to be taken for either mad or drunk; and so, without entering into expla-

nations, he dexterously turned the conversation into its former channel.

The two who had just passed into the inn were followed by the rotund and greasy person of Veleno, whose olive, bearded and malicious countenance revealed an unmistakable combination of the rogue and assassin. Without any display of assiduity, he just touched his cap and said:

"Your orders, gentlemen!"

The one known to us as Michele advanced and said:

"We want supper."

The landlord made a grimace, and answered in a regretful tone, to which he endeavoured to impart an air of sincerity:

"Supper! you mean a mouthful of anything that can be scraped together. . . . Goodness only knows what there is to be found in the house in these times of distress from the siege! Formerly a loaf was worth a cortonese, but now it costs half a florin; that is what I

pay for it at the oven. . . . At any rate, I will do my best for gentlemen like you. . . . I will see what can be done."

With this exordium, intended, inn-keeper fashion, as a pretext for extorting five times the value of everything, he opened a cupboard, and, dragging out a stew-pan, put it on the stove; and with the help of the wind created by his apron, which wafted the ashes up to the ceiling, a junk of kid was soon warmed. This, the landlord asserted, was the only meat to be had then in Barletta, and that it was to have constituted the supper of a corporal who might come in for it at any moment: "But, of course, gentlemen, such as they, could not be sent to bed fasting."

However that might be, the food was acceptable, and was served in earthenware kitchen utensils, together with a bloated-looking flagon of the same material, and half a cheese made of sheep's milk, and hard as a stone, which was imprinted with the marks of the knives of

previous customers who had experimented on it. The table at which they sat was at the bottom of the hall, if such a name could be given to this smoky den. Facing them, at the top, a large chimney, with a "cappa"* capable of holding a dozen people, was fitted on both sides with three or four stoves; in front of it was the cook's table; and from the middle of this, in the shape of a T, a narrow table extended the whole length of the place, nearly to the opposite wall where the two were supping. From the main beam was suspended in the midst a brass lamp with four wicks, almost extinguished, but giving sufficient light for people to avoid breaking their shins against the benches and stools which surrounded the table.

The host, when he had supplied all the wants of his guests, whistling as was his wont,

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* A sort of hood made of tin, which is always to be seen in kitchens in Italy.

returned to the doorway exactly at the moment when a man, galloping up on a mule and jumping off without touching the stirrup, exclaimed:

"Halloo, young fellows! joy be with you! Keep your spirits up, for I have good news for you; and as for you, Veleno, if you had twenty pair of arms there would be plenty for all of them to do. Diego Garcia has returned and dismounted at home; he will be here directly for supper: there will be from twenty to five-and-twenty good swordsmen, and he is equal to four by himself; therefore, mind you are prepared, and be quick. . . . Well, what are you about? Look alive! bustle about."

The landlord stood open-mouthed while the soldiers surrounded and jostled the messenger to hear how the foray had gone off. "If you kill me," said he, pushing them off and extricating himself, "you will know nothing. Who shall speak, you or I?"

"Speak! Speak!" cried they, all together; "what is the news?"

"The news is, that we have just returned, dead tired; that we have been fourteen hours on horseback without a gulp of water . . . (Heigh Veleno! a threefold measure of wine, fresh drawn! My throat is as dry as a piece of tinder. . .) but forty head of cattle and thirty score of sheep are already in Barletta, and three knights prisoners, who, please goodness, shall disgorge as many shining golden ducats as we number baptised Christians, if they wish to see the threshold of their homes again. I can tell you, it was no child's play, unhorsing them and getting their swords. . . . (Will you bring that wine before I drop down dead? . . .) Their blows fell as thick as a flight of arrows. One in particular was on the ground, his wounded horse having thrown him; they were all crying out to him: 'Surrender or die!' He only wielded his broadsword the more fiercely, and if it had

not been broken in a blow which he aimed at Inigo's horse, but which struck the iron saddle-bow instead, we should either have been obliged to finish him with our lances or we should have lost him. However, at last he gave up the half sword which he still retained to Diego Garcia." Veleno, at this point, came with the wine, and poured some out for the narrator who said to him, "It is a mercy you have brought it at last."

"And what 's the name of this fire-eater?" asked Boscherino.

"I don't know; they said he was a great French baron; some name like La Crotte. . . . La . . . La Motta; yes, now I remember, La Motta: a regular desperado, and no mistake. Suffice it to say, all ended well; and please goodness, we will now have a feast." Casting his eyes round the interior of the inn, he exclaimed: 'What are you about, you treacherous coward! Why! you have put nothing yet on the fire. Do you want me to

measure your shoulders with this javelin?" He entered indeed to fulfil his threat, but stopped on seeing that a large pot had already been put on an armful of oak branches, and the flame was catching and flaring up with a crackling noise, while the host, red and perspiring, was running about the house arranging everything, forgetful of the famine and siege, well knowing that Paredes and his fellows would stand no nonsense.

In the twinkling of an eye he had found everything he required, and stripping off the skin of a lamb, he set part on to boil, and part he impaled on two long spits which he hung up to revolve on the hooks of the chimney-piece. Affairs began to look promising.

"Ah well! it is a good thing for you Veleno! if they had arrived and found you not ready, you would have learnt by experience the weight of Diego Garcia's fingers. I will be off now, and send them to you in a trice."

"Oh, Ramozzotto! won't you come with them?" asked one of the corporals.

"How could I possibly come? the company is still on horseback. I have got to find them quarters, and keep an eye on the booty in the castle square: at night, as you well know, the light-fingered gentry are apt to be about, and there are not a few of them in these squadrons. Fieramosca, Miale Brancaleone and all our men are there on guard, and it is our look-out that nothing goes wrong: it will be the Spaniards' turn another time: every man to his own business."

"In that case," resumed Boscherino, "we will go with you and lend you a hand. Come along mates, be good-natured! this good fellow has travelled many more miles than we have, and the least we can do is to help him." So leaving the inn, still discussing the events of the day, they went on their way towards the place were Ramazzotto's company was waiting for him. The latter, dragging his steed after

him by the bridle, was walking in their midst, telling his adventures and answering questions, and Boscherino was following, quite intent on what he was saying, when he felt himself pulled by the cloak, and turning round saw, in the shade, a man whom he recognised as one of those he had left at supper.

"Boscherino," whispered he, stopping him while the others went on, "the Duke wants to speak to you; don't be alarmed, for he does not mean any harm to you; however, keep on your guard, and be cautious. Come along!"

Great was Boscherino's consternation at this address, and, almost inaudibly, he gasped out, "Are you Don Michele?"

"Yes, I am; hold your tongue, and behave like the sensible man you generally are."

Boscherino had been troop sergeant to Signor Gio. Pagolo Baglioni and other Italian lords, and in the wars of that period he had always behaved with the greatest valour; no man shrank less than he from facing danger of

any sort; so much so, that when the company of five hundred foot and a hundred arquebusiers was being formed under Signor Prospero's orders, as reinforcements to Consalvo's army, a considerable amount of pay had been assigned to him, and he was very highly esteemed.

But, though naturally brave, his heart sank and his knees trembled at the words he had just heard from Don Michele, and at the notion of being obliged to return, aware, as he was, in whose presence he would in a few moments be standing; and could he have had his choice, he would have preferred running full tilt against a dozen swords rather than going on his present errand. Thinking over what had taken place a short time previously, he made a guess at the truth, and said to himself:

"I am but too certain he heard me when I said 'The Duke' . . . . the devil himself made my tongue wag . . . . he was a long way off, too, and I don't think I raised my

voice so much as all that. But no distance is too great for that spirit of evil . . . . and what mischief can he be up to here?"

While thus cogitating, they reached the inn. No one was in the kitchen, with the exception of the household. The Duke had been shown into the chamber where he was to sleep, which was over the large supper-room; and the rafters of the ceiling, being badly joined, left gaps which allowed everything to be seen and heard that went on below. The host certainly entertained a suspicion that his guest was not what he wished to appear; but communication from the land side being cut off by the enemy, all sorts of strangers arrived by way of the sea, and any face differing a little from the common run did not attract much notice.

Don Michele and Boscherino went upstairs to the room occupied by the Duke. A bed covered with grey linen stuff, a small table, and a few stools, were the only furniture in the room; the draught, made by the opening door,

blew out the flickering lantern; and Boscherino, while Don Michele went for another light, was left alone in the dark with the Duke. He remained motionless where he was, crouched up against the wall, not daring to speak, nor hardly to breathe, and marvelling at himself for feeling so small; the bump of veneration having naturally no place in his composition. But the consciousness that he was in the presence of that extraordinary and terrible man (so close, indeed, that in the prevailing silence his regular breathing was audible) produced such a fit of shivers that life seemed a burden to him.

Don Michele returned with the lamp, and the Duke was then seen to be seated on the side of the bed. His appearance was that of a man who had never known repose either of mind or body. Of well-knit frame and wiry limbs, a trifle above the ordinary height, a certain tremulousness was noticeable in every movement. He was dressed in a short dark

cloak with slashed sleeves; a small dagger was stuck in his girdle, and a sword lay on the table, as well as a hat adorned with a single black feather. He had gloves on his hands, and his legs were encased in thick travelling boots. Turning towards the new comers, he displayed to view a pallid face, hollow cheeks marked with livid spots, a reddish beard, and moustaches which drooped in two long tufts over his bosom. The expression of his eye, shifting as it did with each prevailing mood, completely baffles definition — at one moment malignant as a viper's, the next beaming as an infant's, and at times glaring with the ferocity of a hyena.

He looked at Boscherino who was trying to shrink into nothing and still remained rooted to the spot as though he expected sentence of death; but calculated as was his glance to remove apprehension, Boscherino knew who and what he was, and was not in the least reassured.

"You recognised me, Boscherino," he began, "and I am glad of it; I always considered you a faithful and worthy man, and if you had not come in my way, I should have looked you up. I knew very well you were here: do not mention to anyone that you have seen me. You know I can reward you for your services, and it would not be much to your advantage to displease me."

The troop sergeant was quite alive to the truth of this remark, so he answered:

"Your illustrious Excellency, I am entirely at your disposal, and I shall continue, as heretofore, to be a faithful servant to you. I think my past life has always been a proof of it. I only beg your Excellency for leave to speak a few words."

The Duke having signed to him to say on, he resumed:

"I have sworn fealty to you, glorious Seignior, and you will never find it fail you to the end of time: but mayhap, some one else has

seen you, and if after my leaving here the secret were to ooze out, I might be blamed for it, without being the least in fault; so I do not see my way out of it without loss of credit."

"Very good!" answered the Duke, "that need not trouble you: if you take care to act honourably by me, I shall not charge you with anything you do not deserve. My business requires me to remain concealed for a few hours; at the end of that time, any one is at liberty to know or say what he likes; but as you value my favour, do not let it ever slip out of *your* mouth."

Boscherino made no reply; he merely reverently bent his head, his whole attitude expressive of submission, and anxiety lest any doubt should be entertained about his readiness to obey orders. He took his leave, and, walking backwards with many bows, left the room, greatly relieved at getting clear off. Some minutes later, Don Michele likewise went out;

he found the room set apart for him, shut himself in, and for the rest of the night the upper story of the inn remained as quiet as if it were uninhabited.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHALLENGE.

"The war-horse masterless is on the earth,
And that last gasp hath burst his bloody girth;
And near, yet quivering with what life remained,
The heel that urged him, and the hand that rein'd."

Lara.

Sir AND.—"Will either of you bear me a challenge to him?"

Sir TO.—"Go, write it in a martial hand."

Twelfth Night.

THE troop for which the supper was prepared reached Veleno's house about two hours after dark, and filled, in a moment, the large room on the ground floor, where everything was in readiness. The host had exerted himself to

the utmost to do himself credit, by laying the table with clean cloths, on which, besides the latteen and pewter plates, knives and forks, (which were brighter than usual in consequence of extra scrubbing), vine leaves were scattered here and there, acting as platters on which to stand the bottles and glasses; the lustre of many lights caused these to sparkle with myriads of drops of water, bearing witness that they had lately been rinsed out. Diego Garcia di Paredes entered first, and after him the captive French barons, Jacques de Guignes, Giraut de Forces and La Mothe. The Spaniard, the boldest and strongest man in the whole army, and perhaps in all Europe, seemed formed by nature expressly for the profession of arms, the principal elements for success in which were vigour and muscular force. His stature exceeded by not a little that of his companions, and the constant exertion to which his active temperament disposed him, by eliminating every particle of grossness from his

limbs, had given such prominence to every muscle, that his chest, shoulders and other members resembled the colossal figures of ancient sculpture, combining the athletic with the beautiful. His neck, thick as a bull's, supported a small, closely-cropped, curly head, and a bold, manly face without a shade of arrogance. Don Garcia's aspect was not wanting in a certain grace, and in his countenance might have been deciphered the signs of a simple, loyal, and honourable mind. He had already taken off his armour, and kept nothing on but a jerken and close-fitting leathern hose, so that each motion revealed the play of the muscles as plainly as if they had been uncovered. A short mantle thrown over one shoulder, in the Spanish fashion, completed his plain attire. "My Lord Barons," said he, motioning forward the prisoners with chivalrous courtesy, "we Spaniards say, *Duelos con pan son menos.**

* Misfortunes, with bread are lessened.

Fortune has treated you badly to-day; perhaps our turn will come to-morrow. Meanwhile, here we meet as friends; let us proceed to supper, for I think we shall all agree on that point. More than one lance has been broken, and that is enough for to-day. We certainly cannot be reproached with letting our armour become rusty. Be of good cheer, we will talk about the ransom to-morrow, and you shall see that Diego Garcia knows how to treat gentlemen."

La Mothe's bearing during this address conveyed the impression that he was suffering from extreme irritation which he was struggling hard to conceal. Valiant, a good soldier, and proud of his profession, with a personal appearance not unworthy of his rank, he was, however, the haughtiest of the haughty, and a bitter pill was it to him to receive courtesy at the hands of his captor. Nevertheless, conscious what bad manners it would be considered to show his disgust, he answered as gaily as he could:

"If your hand is as light in laying on a ransom as in dealing a blow, the Most Christian King must pay it out of his own purse if he wants to have us back again, or I shall bear you company for the rest of my days."

"Inigo," said Paredes (turning to a fine youth about twenty-five years of age, who, while waiting for supper, had made an attack on the bread), "talking of sword-cuts, we will ask your horse how he relished this knight's thrusts."

Then turning the conversation to La Mothe: "It is rather late in the day to notice that you are disarmed! Here is my sword for you" (and ungirding it, he hung it at his prisoner's side); "it would be a shame if an arm like yours had not a hilt to lean on. You will consider Barletta your prison till you are exchanged or ransomed. Your parole, Sir Knight." La Mothe held out his right hand to Paredes who took it, and added:

"The same conditions hold good for your

companions. Do you agree?" and so saying, he turned to Correa and Azevedo, two men-at-arms who had captured La Mothe's companions. They signified that they were content, and both, with the same courtesy, took off their swords and girded them on the French barons.

"Supper is ready, gentlemen!" at this moment called out Veleno, placing on the middle of the table a heavy pot, containing half a lamb, garnished with onions and vegetables, and at the extremities two large dishes full of salad. The appearance of food had an equal effect with the host's voice in attracting the famished assembly. All, eagerly making a move and settling the benches, were seated in a trice and hard at work; and for some time not a syllable was heard—nothing but the clatter of plates and glasses, and rattling of knives and forks.

Alone, at the head of the table, sat Diego Garcia, and on either side of him he had placed

La Mothe and De Guignes. Hacking away with a large dagger, he speedily hewed the animal to pieces, and divided it among the company. Blessed with the digestion of an ostrich, his appetite (to which two incomparable rows of strong white teeth acted as excellent auxiliaries) was, after a few minutes, appeased if not satisfied: not so much as a scrap to throw to a dog was left on his plate. Having finished his portion, he first filled his neighbours' glasses and then his own.

When the edge had been somewhat taken off the ravenous hunger of the party, talking gradually began; questions, answers, and repartee being bandied to and fro, principally bearing on the incidents of the war, on horses, blows given or received, and the various accidents of the past day. At the lower end of the table, where the twenty and odd Spaniards were sitting (leaving, by courtesy, to their leader and the French prisoners what they called the *cabacera*, or head of the table), might

be remarked that friendly interchange of acts and words which is apt to spring up amongst men who are daily thrown together in deadly peril, when they learn not to under-rate the value of a hand ready to help in time of need.

The rugged, sunburnt faces of these warriors, inflamed by exercise, recent fatigue, and the heat of the food, produced (by the light falling from the lamps above) an effect of chiaro-scuro worthy of the pencil of Gherardo delle Notti.

Towards the end of supper, conversation, of course, became more general, and those who had gained honour and profit from the warlike fatigues of the day became more and more hilarious. Inigo's face was the only one that showed no disposition to brighten. He sat with his arm leaning on the table, looking about him, and paying little heed to the Babel of voices around him.

"Inigo," said Azevedo, holding out his hand, (he had perhaps drunk a glass more than

usual, and being of a jovial turn could not bear to see one of the party look gloomy,) "Inigo, anyone would suppose you to be in love, if the women of Barletta were worthy of having eyes made at them by a fine lad like you! But here there's no danger of that, thank goodness! I trust you have not left your heart behind you either in Spain or Naples."

"Women are far enough from my thoughts," retorted the young man, "but I am thinking about my good horse which that baron nearly killed, because he would go on fighting like a madman when he might have seen he had no chance of escape. I am afraid its shoulder is injured past all hope. Poor Castagno! I don't believe I shall ever again have your equal under me! Do you remember how well the poor brute carried me at Taranto, and when we forded that river . . . I forget its name . . . where Quignones was killed . . . and the water was higher than we expected; who reached the bank first? And after passing

through so many trials and dangers, just to think of his coming to an untimely end, all through that heathen!"

"Don't raise your voice so loud," said Correa; "it happened in fair fight, and we ought not to annoy the prisoners by letting them hear such remarks."

"I take my oath," returned Inigo, "that I would willingly be down myself, badly wounded, if I could but see my poor Castagno sound again; and I would forgive the Frenchman if he had broken his sword on my head instead of hurting the horse. It is the man you aim at; at least anyone does who knows how to hold a sword, and not here and there and everywhere, like a madman. Curse him! one would have supposed him to be driving away the flies!"

"You are quite right!" cried Segredo, an old soldier with beard and moustaches which showed that their owner had been in many a fray. "When I was young, I thought like

you: look at my forehead (and tapping it lightly with a hand that his iron glove had made callous, he pointed to a scar which seamed his brow horizontally), I got that from *el rey Chico* all for the sake of a horse, the most splendid bay in the whole camp! That was something like a horse! Whenever I had to use my sword in action, it was quite enough to shake the bridle a little, and give him the least touch with the spur, and what did he do, but rear up, pawing the air, so that I can tell you I had to grip tight with both knees to prevent myself tumbling off; as he came down again, down I came with him, having gained such impetus for my sword-cut, that it descended like a thunderbolt, and thus more than one Moor has been sent to sup with Satan. And then the siesta! I used to sleep between his legs in the shade, poor *Zamoreno de mi alma*, he hardly venturing to drive away the flies, for fear of disturbing me. At the siege of Carthagena, where very few of you can have

been, and where the great Captain began to make himself a name . . . and Segredo can tell you that was making war in something like style; rather different from the present . . . under the eyes of King Ferdinand and the beautiful Queen Isabella, and of all the Court . . . well paid, and ourselves and chargers well kept, as beseemed the house of a prince . . . But to return to my horse. In a sortie in which *el rey Chico* fought like a lion at the head of his forces (and though he only came up to my shoulder, he had an arm which left its mark on whatever he touched) the poor beast had his neck pierced through and through with a Moorish javelin, and for the first time in his life fell on his knees. I jumped off, and saw there was nothing to be done for him. However, I hoped to be able to lead him back to camp, for I would not have deserted him for anything in the world; he followed me, though he was hardly able to stand, and I am not ashamed to say that hot tears flowed over the

gorget of my helmet and bathed my neck. It was the only time I ever cried since I was a child! Just then a swarm of Moors turned back, hard pressed by several men-at-arms: their king was obliged to flee, and came on roaring like a bull. I, caught in the throng, alone and on foot, gave myself up for lost. I kept more than one at bay with my sword, but the king's sabre crashed on my head, splitting my helmet, and I remained stunned for a time. When I recovered my senses, and was able to rise, I found poor Zamoreno stretched dead beside me."

All at table had listened with interest to Segredo's account of his horse's fate; and as he finished, the old soldier could not help betraying in his face furrowed by age and toils, that the memory of his old companion was still very dear to him; but feeling ashamed of this display of emotion, he poured out some drink in order to divert the attention which was concentrated on him.

Jacques de Guignes, who, as well as the other prisoners, had been recovering his spirits in proportion as his hunger became appeased, having heard the history of Zamoreno, commenced:

"*Chez nous*, Sir Knight, this would have been less likely to have occurred (though true, *les bonnes coutumes de chevalerie* are becoming more disregarded every day). However, a good man-at-arms, if equally matched, would, even now, consider it very low form to let his sword fall on his enemy's horse. But, as we all know, that sort of courtesy cannot be expected from the Moors."

"Nevertheless," said Inigo, answering a remark which was not addressed to him, "it can be proved that it is not among Moors *only* that the custom prevails of killing horses. The plains below Benevento could tell a tale, and poor Manfred knew it to his cost. And Charles of Anjou who gave the order, was no more a Moor than you or I."

This was a home-thrust, and the Frenchman writhed upon his seat.

"So it is said: it may possibly be true; but Charles of Anjou was fighting for a kingdom, and then he had to do with an ex-communicated enemy of the Church."

"And, pray, what claim had he to another man's heritage?" interrupted Inigo, with a bitter smile.

"I think you must know," intervened La Mothe, "that the kingdom of Naples is a feudatory of the Holy See, and that Charles had the investiture of it; and then, the right of a good sword does not count for nothing."

"And then . . . and then . . . don't let us mince matters," resumed Inigo; "Manfredi's bearded Germans, and the thousand Italian knights led by Count Giordano, who were fighting against the French, had made such a stubborn resistance from the beginning of the battle, that Charles of Anjou, wishing to become King of Naples, thought it advisable

to have recourse to this expedient in spite of the *bonnes coutumes de chevalerie* then in vogue."

"I grant you, if you like," answered La Mothe, "that there is some pluck to be found behind a German's breastplate, and that they did manage to make a short stand against the French *gendarmerie* at the battle of Benevento; but as for your thousand Italians, if, two centuries ago, they were the same as they are now, the French need not have wasted their time mutilating their poor horses, in order to put them to flight. During the five years I have been in Italy, I have learnt to know them. I have followed King Charles in the company of the valiant Louis d'Ars, and I can assure you that the frauds of the Italians have given us far more trouble than their swords. The only warfare they understand is the only one which French loyalty ignores."

These bombastic words gave little satisfaction to any present, and especially displeased

Inigo, who had culture and talent above the average. He was on friendly terms with several Italians fighting under the Spanish flag, and he knew exactly what had taken place in the descent of Charles into Italy. He knew, for one thing, that, in spite of French loyalty, they had broken their agreement with the Florentines, and incited Pisa to rebel; neither had the fortresses placed in their hands, by the imprudence of Pietro de' Medici, been restored at the time to which they were pledged. All this occurred to Inigo, and La Mothe's words roused in him a feeling of indignation that the poor Italians should not only be betrayed and ill-treated by the French, but also be accused by them of treachery and loaded with abuse; he was on the point of expressing his opinion on the subject, when La Mothe, perceiving that his observations were not favourably received, added:

"You are not long from Spain, gentlemen, and you do not yet know what a despicable

race the Italians are. You have had no transactions with Duke Ludivico, nor with the Pope, nor with Valentino who at first received us with open arms, and then tried to stab us in the back. But at Fornova they had a lesson as to what a handful of brave men can do against a swarm of traitors; and the Moor was the first to be taken in his own toils. Villain! if he had no other crime to answer for but the death of his nephew, would not that suffice to brand him as the most infamous of assassins?"

"But," said Correa, "his nephew was sickly and weak-minded, and it is asserted that he died a natural death."

"Yes! the natural death of all those who are poisoned. De Forses and De Guignes know it, for they were quartered with me in the Castle of Pavia. The King went to visit Galeazzo's poor family. (All this I have from Philippe de Comines own mouth, to whom the King himself related it). The Moor conducted them, through a succession of dark passages,

into two low damp rooms which overlooked the castle moat. He found the Duke of Milan and his wife Isabella with their children. She threw herself at the King's feet, imploring his favour for her father; and she would have been glad to have done so also for herself and her husband, but for the presence of that treacherous Moor. Poor Galeazzo, pale and emaciated, said little, and seemed stupified by the enormity of his misfortune: his blood was already infected with the poison which killed him . . . and Cesar Borgia, just to mention one other; there's a precious pair for you! If I were to tell you some of the things we have seen him do, you would hardly believe me! However, many of his performances are very well known. Everyone knows he killed his brother to obtain his honours and possessions. Everyone knows what he did to become master of Romagna: everyone knows that he killed his brother-in-law, and has poisoned cardinals, bishops,

and ever so many more who gave him offence."

Turning then to his French companions, as though recalling a pitiful and well-known fact:

"And poor Ginevra of Monreale! The most beautiful, virtuous, and amiable woman I ever met! These friends of mine remember her: we saw her in our passage through Rome in 'ninety-two. But her evil star made her acquainted with Duke Valentino, then cardinal. She was the wife of one of our soldiers whom she had married, rather from obedience to her father than any other reason. She was seized with an illness which no one could specify: all sorts of remedies were tried in vain, and she died. But a singular accident made me discover an infernal secret to which few were privy. Her illness was nothing else but poison given her by Valentino to punish her for her virtue. Poor creature! are not such things enough to call down the thunderbolts of heaven?"

Here the Frenchman paused to reflect, evidently trying to recall to his memory some circumstance which had become less vivid through the lapse of time.

"Yes, I am sure I am not mistaken. To-day, among your men-at-arms coming to Barletta, I noticed one whose name, to tell the truth, I forget; but I remember perfectly to have seen him several times in Rome at that period. He has a face and figure not easily forgotten. It was the general talk that he was, in secret, Ginevra's lover, and after her death he disappeared, and I never heard anything more of him. (*Mais oui, je suis sûr que c'est le même,*" said he, turning to his companions.) "About a mile from the town, where we stopped at a fountain to wait for the foot-soldiers—that pale young man with the chesnut hair. I do not think I ever saw a finer or more melancholy face than his. Yes, yes! that was certainly he! but there is no use asking me his name."

The Spaniards looked at one another, questioning of whom he was speaking.

"Was he Italian?" asked one.

"Yes, Italian. True, he did not open his mouth; but a comrade, who had dismounted and was handing him something to drink, spoke Italian to him."

"And his arms?"

"I fancy he had on a smooth cuirass, with a coat of mail, and, if I am not mistaken, a plume and blue scarf."

Inigo was the first to exclaim "Ettore Fieramosca!"

"Fieramosca! precisely so!" answered La Mothe. "Now I remember, Fieramosca. Well, this Fieramosca was in love with Ginevra (at least, so they said), and many people, not seeing him appear after her death, thought he had committed suicide."

The Spaniards, smiling at these words, remarked to one another that this accounted for his habitual melancholy, his living so much

alone, and so differently from most young men of his condition. All, however, agreed in praising his valour, good nature, and courtesy; so it was evident that he was much loved and esteemed by the whole army. Inigo, especially, who was his friend (and like every high-minded man, feeling admiration unalloyed with jealousy for the splendid natural gifts of the Italian warrior, loving him all the more as he acknowledged his superiority), began to sing his praises with all the warmth of friendship of which a susceptible Spanish heart is capable.

"No wonder you admire his face; who could help admiring it? But what matters beauty to a man? If you could only see into his mind, and know how noble and large-hearted he is! All his daring feats, too, are performed with that venturesome courage which, in most men, goes hand in hand with hot-headedness, but with him is always combined with the most perfectly cool judgment. I have been acquainted with many brave men in the course

of my life, both at the courts of France and Spain, but I give you my honour, I have never found a single one uniting every good quality like that Italian, and what's more, I don't expect ever to meet with another."

Fieramosca was so popular in the army that all present evinced their interest by chiming in, and discussing his affairs; nor did old Segredo prove harder-hearted than the others.

"Although," said he, "I have never had time to waste on women, nor ever could understand a mailed breast bothering about them, yet I confess to an unaccountable sort of feeling for that excellent youth, so melancholy and dejected as he always looks! and I swear I would give my best horse (always excepting the 'Leopard') to hear him burst into a hearty fit of laughter."

"Didn't I tell you he was in love?" said Azevedo. "When you see a young man, pale, silent, seeking solitude, no mistake about

it, there 's a petticoat in the case! True, however," added he, smiling, "two or three games lost at zecchinetta are even sometimes a more bitter pill still, and effect one's spirits more than if ten petticoats were at stake . . . but no matter; that is quite a different thing, and is sooner past and gone. And as for Fieramosca, he runs no risk of that sort; I have never seen him with a card in his hand. . . . Now I understand the object of his nocturnal expeditions. You know that my windows look out on to the mole? more than once, quite late at night, I have seen him get into a small boat, all by himself, row out some distance, and turn behind the castle. '*Buon viaggio*,' said I, going to bed, 'everyone to his own taste.' I thought he had some love-affair on hand, but I never dreamt of his going out to sea to weep over somebody in the other world. It seems impossible—a soldier like him to give way to such folly!"

"It only shows," answered Inigo, warmly,

"that a good and loving heart is not incompatible with an intrepid spirit; and we must do Fieramosca the justice to say that he, as well as any of the Italians enrolled under the brothers Colonna's standard, can vie in gallantry with any man bearing sword or lance, be he who he may."

The Spaniards, by word and gesture, expressed acquiescence in this eulogium uttered with all the fire of a frank and truth-loving nature; indeed, it would have been impossible for them to have done otherwise, being daily witnesses of the valour displayed by the Italian men-at-arms. But the French prisoners had by this time become heated both by wine and argument; La Mothe, in particular, exasperated with Inigo who had been goading him during the whole of supper-time, true to his native arrogance, was not disposed to admit that there could be any question of instituting comparisons between them and himself and his countrymen; he received the Spaniard's

remarks with a studied laugh and look of compassion that made the young man flush to the roots of his hair with anger, which redoubled when La Mothe went on:

"As to that, Sir Knight, neither I nor my companions are of your opinion. For many years past we have been making war in Italy, and, pray believe me, as I said before, we have seen daggers and poison much more called into play than swords and lances. A French gens-d'arme would be ashamed to have even as a groom any one of those Italian poltroons: the idea, indeed, of comparing them to us!"

"Listen, chevalier, and open your ears wide," retorted Inigo, who, at this abuse of his friends, could no longer restrain his passion, and felt the utmost satisfaction in being able to give vent to his indignation against the man who had maimed his horse: "if any of our Italians were here, and above all Fieramosca, and if you were free, instead of being Don Garcia's prisoner, you would have good cause

to learn, before going to bed, that a French man-at-arms might have both his hands full in holding his own against an Italian; but, since you are a prisoner, and there are none present but Spaniards, I, who am a friend of Fieramosca and of the Italians, declare, in their name, that I am ready to give the lie to any man who asserts that they fear to meet in arms anyone whomsoever, or are, as you say, cowards and traitors; and they are ready to challenge comparison with the whole world, on foot or on horseback, with the sword or any sort of weapons, wherever, whenever and as often as you please."

La Mothe and his companions, who at the commencement of this harangue had turned their eyes haughtily in the direction of the speaker, towards the end of it, gradually changed countenance from anger and surprise. As it always happens, when amidst mirth and revelry a voice is heard raised threatening bloodshed, that there falls a sudden silence

on the assembly, while in anxious suspense it awaits the *denouement*, so now every Spaniard sat all expectation as to what would be the result of this first rupture.

"We are prisoners," answered La Mothe, with proud humility, "and may not accept challenges; however, subject to the approval of the soldiers who have our swords, and who of course will receive a fair ransom for us, I answer and repeat, in my own name and that of the whole French chivalry, what I have already once said and what I shall always assert, that the Italians are *not* fit for warfare, but only for plotting treachery; and that they are the worst men-at-arms that ever put foot in stirrup or wore a cuirass. And whoever says that I am a liar lies himself; and this I will maintain at the point of the sword." Then, taking a cross out of his bosom, after kissing it, he placed it on the table. "When my last hour shall come, may I have no hope in this sign of our salvation, may I be esteemed

a disloyal knight and unworthy to wear gold spurs, if I and my comrades do not answer to the challenge which the Italians send me by your mouth; and by the grace of God, our Lady and St. Denis who will aid the righteous cause, we will show the whole world the difference between a French man-at-arms and this Italian rabble, your *protegés*."

"So be it," answered Inigo. Then he also, opening his corset, drew from his neck an image of the Madonna of Monserrato, with which he made a sign of the cross, and laid it beside La Mothe's golden cross; and though he felt slightly mortified at being prevented by his poverty from offering a gage equal in value to La Mothe's, yet shaking off that false shame, he said frankly: "Here is my gage; let Diego Garcia take them both in the name of Consalvo, who will not refuse a neutral battle-field to our noble friends nor to the French knights who come to fight them."

"Surely no," answered Garcia, taking the

pledges of the challenge; "Consalvo will never prevent these gallants from measuring their swords, and doing the devoir of good knights; but you, Sir Baron, will have a harder nut to crack than you think."

"*C'est notre affaire*," answered the Frenchman, shaking his head and laughing; "neither I nor my comrades would esteem it the most splendid or dangerous feat of our lives to unhorse *four* Italians, and thus prove to this brave Spaniard that he is in the wrong."

Diego Garcia, who never felt really alive except when he was either engaged in the thick of a *melée*, or talking about fighting, could not contain himself for joy at these preliminaries to a challenge, the issues of which would undoubtedly be contested with all the fury inspired by national rivalry; raising both head and voice, and clapping his hands which would have formed fit appendages to Samson's arms, he cried out: "Your words, cavaliers, are worthy of men of honour and of

soldiers like yourselves, and I am sure your deeds will not belie them. Long live the brave of all nations!" So saying, he and all the others raised their glasses and, with great glee, emptied them more than once in honour of the future conquerors. When the noise had somewhat abated, Inigo added: "Your insult to Italian valour is not a thing, Sir Knight, that my friends will pass over lightly, nor will their satisfaction end with the breaking of a lance, as though it were only a matter of carrying off the prize in a tournament; I am not speaking now of the number of combatants, that will be settled by agreement between the two parties; but be that as it may, I offer you *bataille à l'outrance* until every man is taken, killed, or obliged to quit the field. Do you accept these terms?"

"I do accept them."

These conditions being settled—as there was nothing else to be done—the lateness of the hour produced a general disposition to retire

to rest after the fatigues of the day. The company rose from table by common consent and, leaving the inn, broke up by degrees, as each one repaired to his own lodging. The French barons were honourably treated, and had accommodation provided for them with the men-at-arms who had taken them prisoners. We think we may venture to assert that, in spite of their bravado in professing such contempt for the Italians, they felt conscious and, to some extent, were warned by experience that deeds, rather than words, were called for, if they wished to come off with flying colours. Inigo also, though more than convinced of his friends' valour and of their readiness to uphold the glory of the Italian arms against the whole world, still could not help reflecting that their adversaries were also warriors of the greatest renown, and the best swordsmen in the French army; so that there was room for anxiety as to the result of this momentous engagement. In fact, La Mothe and his comrades were men

fit to cope with anyone. Their prowess was noted among all the military of the period, and in the French squadrons were many others not inferior in skill and courage; to mention only one, the famous Bayard was sufficient alone to throw great weight into the scale.

Despite these considerations, the proud Spaniard did not for an instant repent having taken up the cudgels for the Italians, and would have thought himself very remiss if he had suffered to pass unchallenged the unmerited strictures of that insolent captive on his absent friends. "Besides," argued he, "how can anyone be beaten who fights for his country?"

Taking this cheerful view of affairs, he resolved to confer the next morning with Fieramosca, and concert with him all such measures as might conduce to the credit of the party with which he had identified himself; meanwhile, under the influence of these honour-

able sentiments, so great was his eagerness to set matters afoot, that sleep for that night was well-nigh banished from his pillow.

CHAPTER III.

ETTORE FIERAMOSCA.

"My country's groans have bade me draw
My sword for gospel and for law."

Rokeby.

THE fortress of Barletta, occupied by Consalvo and several chiefs of his army, was situated between the largest piazza in the town and the sea. Close at hand, in the houses round about, were lodged all the Italian and Spanish officers with their followers. Amongst others, in one of the best habitations, the brothers Prospero and Fabrizio Colonna were living with the sumptuous train of squires, domestics

and horses beseeming their high rank. Ettore Fieramosca was an especial favourite of theirs, on account of his manifold merits, and they treated him as a son, giving up to his exclusive use a small house adjoining their own close to the beach, which took in comfortably himself, servants, horses, and baggage. The upper room, where he used to sleep, had windows looking towards the east.

It was the morning after the supper. The first flush of dawn had hardly yet brought into relief the line where the sea blended with the horizon, when young Fieramosca, having risen from his bed, where sleep was often wooed by him in vain, went out on to a terrace, against the foot of which plashed the waves now slightly rippled by the fresh morning breeze.

Poor inhabitant of the north! little do you know the charm of this hour by the sea, beneath a fine southern sky, while nature is still asleep, and the silence is hardly broken by the

muffled gurgle of the wave which, like "thought" has never had one moment's repose since the day of creation, nor will have till the end of time. If, at the first burst of summer heat, you have never stood alone at this hour on the beautiful coasts of the kingdom of Naples, feeling your cheek fanned by a last flap from the wings of the morning bat, you can have no conception of the plenitude of the divine beauty of created things.

A palm-tree grew against the terrace wall. Seated on the parapet, his shoulders leaning against the trunk, and supporting one knee in his clasped hands, our young soldier was enjoying some quiet moments, and drinking in the pure air which precedes dawn.

Nature had endowed him with one of her most precious gifts: an innate disposition towards the Good, Great, and Beautiful. There was only one defect, if such it might be called, of which he could be accused; viz. excessive good-nature. But brought up from his ear-

liest infancy amid the din of arms, he rapidly acquired due knowledge of men and things. His right judgment taught him what bounds to place on complaisance, so that it should not degenerate into weakness; and the austerity, which is so often a characteristic of those who are exposed to constant peril, resolved itself, in his case, into a just firmness, of all manly qualities the most truly excellent.

Fieramosca's father, a Capuan gentleman of the school of Braccio da Montone, grown old in the wars by which Italy was torn during the fifteenth century, could bequeath Ettore nothing but a sword. As a lad, he looked upon the military profession as the only one worthy of his attention; nor could he at that age be expected to rise superior in ideas to the times in which he lived, when warfare was resorted to solely for the sake of fame and aggrandisement.

But as he grew in years he grew in sense; and in the brief intervals of warfare, instead of

spending his leisure in hunting, tournaments, and other juvenile pleasures, he amused himself with study and literature; and after reading, in ancient authors, about the noble deeds of those who spilt their blood for the welfare of their country, and not for the profit of the highest bidder, it began to dawn upon his mind that it was a most shameful thing for him to carry on the profession of arms like a highwayman, with the sole object of enriching himself, instead of with the higher motive of defending himself and his native land from foreign aggression.

In his early youth, he had to accompany his father who was called to Naples on important business. At the court of Alfonzo he became acquainted with the celebrated Pontano who, struck with the boy's talent and physical attractions, took a great fancy to him, and having admitted him into the Academy (which although founded by Panormita, goes by the name of Pontaniana), took infinite pains to

instruct him, and received in return that affectionate worship which is the offspring of gratitude joined to admiration.

Enthusiasm for the politics and glory of Italy, aroused by his master's eloquent words, could not but take a strong hold on such a heart, and rose even to fever heat. He fought a duel with a young French gentleman older and stronger than himself, because he disparaged the Italians; he wounded him, and forced him to make the *amende honorable* in the presence of the King and Court. Having left Naples, after various vicissitudes, he formed the attachment of which we have already had a hint from the French prisoner.

But when Charles VIII. had subverted Italy, and the French army kept the whole country in a state of terrorism if not of actual bondage, the sight of those invaders lording it over his native country inflamed his patriotism to a higher pitch than ever. He chafed at the accounts of their insolence as they passed

through Lombardy, Tuscany and the other Italian states.

When the fame was noised abroad of Pier Capponi's proud answer to the King, and that the latter had given way, his eyes sparkled with joy as he extolled the stout-hearted Florentine to the skies.

The kingdom of Naples fell. Fieramosca thereupon embraced the cause of Spain, in some measure with the view of opposing the inordinate power of its rival, and also because Spanish pride seemed to him less insufferable than French braggadocio; besides, an enemy that could only come by sea, appeared to him to be the least formidable of the two, and he reckoned that when the French had been driven out by its arms, there would be less difficulty in establishing a state of prosperity in Italy.

The last stars were disappearing, one by one, before the brightness diffused from the east. Already the sun was illuminating the highest

peaks of Gargano, tinting them with a rosy dye which was toned down into a purple hue among the mountain glens; while the coast below, in the shape of a half-moon, curving round to the strand on which Barletta is situated, displayed, with increase of daylight, a charming and diversified intermixture of hill and dale bathed by the sea. The thick chesnut groves, the tops of which were already gilded by the sun, becoming thinner towards the outskirts, were, here and there, isolated by green meadows or cultivated patches of land. Here, large boulders lay bleaching in a landslip; there, the side of a ridge was tinged yellow or vermillion, according to the nature of the soil. The blue sea appeared as smooth as glass, except where, seething under the rocks, it begirt their base with a belt of milk-white foam.

In the most sheltered part of the gulf, on a small island joined to the mainland by a long narrow bridge and embowered in palms

and cypresses, might be descried a convent with a chapel and belfry, fortified with turrets and battlements, as a protection against any sudden assault of pirates or Saracens.

Ettore seemed to be watching it with passionate intentness and knitted brows, though hardly able to distinguish the outlines of the edifice on account of the mist which, at that hour, was still hanging about the low lands. He was so absorbed in listening to the faint sound of the bell which announced the matin Ave Maria, that he did not hear the voice of Inigo who was calling out to him in the court-yard, and who, not receiving an answer, ran upstairs.

"After yesterday's hard work I should not have expected to see you up before the sun," said he, stepping out on to the terrace.

Anyone who has ever had his heart full of some engrossing subject, can understand how pleased Fieramosca must have felt at being

thus caught and interrupted. His face, as he turned round towards his visitor, to a certain degree betrayed his feelings, and Inigo could not help seeing that he had arrived at an inopportune moment. But Ettore's spirit was too just and amiable to resent his friend's unintentional intrusion. Without giving any precise answer, he advanced, shook hands, and, at length completely recovering himself, said pleasantly:

"What good wind blows you to me at this hour?"

"A most propitious wind! and I am the bearer of such news that I certainly shall expect a tip in return from you. I have hardly waited till daylight to bring it to you. I have always envied your superiority; to-day I have to fall out with your good fortune. Lucky fellow! My dear Ettore, heaven has reserved for you an honour which you would have purchased, I am sure, at any price. Well! it falls at your feet without trouble or expense.

Truly you were born with a silver spoon in your mouth."

Fieramosca took his friend into the house, and, making him sit down opposite, waited for the announcement of this great piece of luck. He received from him a brief report of what had occurred the previous evening, of how he had taken the Italians' part, and of the proposed challenge. When he repeated La Mothe's insolent words, on which he lay special emphasis, the impetuous Italian sprang up, struck the table with his clenched fist, and exclaimed, as his eyes sparkled with joy and pride:

"Our misery has not yet reached such an extremity that there is any scarcity of either arms or swords to force this French robber to eat his words, and curse the hour he uttered them! Blessings on your tongue, Inigo, my brother!" (here he gave him a close hug)—"I shall be under an eternal obligation to you for the care you have taken of our honour; and

never, in life or death, shall I consider myself absolved from it."

There seemed no end to the caresses on one side, and proffers of service on the other.

The first excitement having somewhat subsided: "But," said Fieramosca, "this is not a time to talk, but to act." And having called a servant, while he was being assisted to dress, he ran over the names of those comrades who were eligible for this enterprise, with the view of making up as large a company as possible.

"We have plenty of good men amongst us, but in a matter of such importance we must select the best. Brancaleone, that 's one; with that pair of shoulders of his to the fore, I'll answer for it there 's not a Frenchman will make him flinch an iota. Capoccio and Giovenale, all three Romans, and I can tell you the Horatii were not better swordsmen than they. That 's three. Let us get on. Fanfulla da Lodi, that mad-cap, do you know him?"

(Inigo raised his head, knitting his brows, and pursing up his lips, as one does when trying to recollect anything.) "Oh, surely you must know him! That Lombard, Signor Fabrizio's free-lance . . . who galloped the other day along the top of the bastion wall, at the Gate of San Baccolo."

"Oh yes, yes! I remember now," answered Inigo.

"Well, that 's four. He will use his hands to some purpose as long as he has any. I shall be the fifth, and, with the help of God, will do my duty. Masuccio," cried he, calling a servant, "look out for a strap of my shield which broke yesterday; have it set to rights and immediately, do you hear? Have a fresh edge put on my broadsword and hanger . . . and . . . what was I going to say to you? Oh! is my Spanish armour all right?"

The servant signified that it was.

Inigo said, smiling at this impetuosity, "There is no occasion for such hurry about

making your preparations, for the battle will be neither to-day nor to-morrow."

Fieramosca was far too excited to think of this, and was eager to begin the fray at once. Paying little attention to what the Spaniard was saying, he shouted: "What could we have been thinking about, leaving out Romanelli da Forlì? that 's six. Ludovico Benavoli, seven. You know them, Inigo; you have seen them at work. Masuccio! Masuccio!"

And the servant, who had gone downstairs, flew up again.

"My battle-horse, Airone, the one Signor Prospero gave me, let him have as much straw and corn as he wants, and trot him up and down for an hour at a time before the heat comes on, and look to his shoes."

He was dressing all the time he was giving these orders; his servant handed him his cloak, and having armed himself and put a cap with a blue feather on his head, he said to Inigo:

"Now, I am ready for you. First of all, we

must talk it over with Signor Prospero, and afterwards apply to Consalvo for a safe conduct."

And so, as they walked on, he continued to enumerate first one and then another of the men-at-arms who might be equal to the occasion. Nor was he satisfied with any of them *primâ facie;* he passed in review the state, strength, valour, and previous life of each, so as to insure that none but men of approved excellence should be engaged in an action of such high import. He ranked the Roman Brancaleone above all the others, because he knew him to be a large-hearted, upright and very hardy man; he liked his serious manner, so different from the thoughtless gaiety of his other associates, and entertained for him a friendship which had often made him on the point of confiding to him his own and Genevra's adventures; but a certain reticence, and perhaps the want of a favourable opportunity, had hitherto withheld him. His family and

forefathers, being Ghibellines, had always upheld the Colonna family in Rome; and now he commanded a body of free-lances in the company of Signor Fabrizio, and acquitted himself admirably in this as well as every other martial vocation. He was of middling stature, broad-shouldered, and deep chested, a man of few words, and devoted to his profession; tenacious and obstinate in prosecuting his own schemes, without a single aim in the world beyond the advancement of the Colonna party, in comparison with which every other object appeared trivial; and in furtherance of this, as well as of any other pledge, he would have risked being cut to pieces a thousand times over.

Ettore and Inigo had to pass before his door on their way to the Colonnas; they found him standing giving orders about his horses; and, sword in hand, with the belt twisted round the hilt, he was, by means of signs to his servants and grooms, making himself un-

derstood with the least possible expenditure of breath. Fieramosca invited him to go with them to arrange the affair, about which he expressed himself with considerable warmth, while Brancaleone listened with perfect composure of face and manner; only sententiously remarking, as he walked along with the other two:

"Proof convinces the blind. Four of my style of lunges, and then we can discuss the point again."

And this confidence was not bravado on his part; for several times he had been hemmed in by the enemy, and had always cut his way through their ranks with honour and glory.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE NEVER DID RUN SMOOTH.

"If then true lovers have been ever cross'd,
It stands as an edict in destiny:
Then let us teach our trial patience
Because it is a customary cross."

Midsummer Night's Dream.

THE defiance which followed on La Mothe's insulting speech, having been uttered in the presence of more than twenty persons, could not long remain a secret, and the fame of it was by this time noised abroad throughout the whole army and town. Inigo and the two Italians, presenting themselves at the house of Prospero Colonna, found it the sole topic of

conversation. Already, the flower of Italian youth had begun to pour in, having recourse to him as their leader to arrange proceedings. One by one there dropped in all those whom Fieramosca had named, and many others besides; so that in a short space of time there were at least fifty assembled. Their words were many and bold, and all, in face and gesture, evinced how they smarted under the insult. Many of the Spaniards who had been at supper the previous night, and related what had passed to their Italian friends, also flocked hither, and mixed amongst them; whilst, by repeating this and that expression used by Inigo and the prisoners, making observations, proposing means and citing examples, they fanned a flame which was already burning tolerably fiercely.

Part of this assemblage was standing on the threshold of the front entrance, or scattered about the courtyard; the rest had gathered together in a hall on the ground floor, where

the brothers Colonna used to give audience whenever necessary to their men, and settle the affairs of the company. Against the walls hung their suits of armour, richly inlaid with gold, very finely engraved, polished and bright as mirrors. Here was kept the banner of the company, on which was embroidered a column on a red field, with the motto, *Columna flecti nescio*. The same device was likewise depicted on the shields which, together with other weapons symmetrically arranged, occupied almost the whole walls. In the background, two large wooden trestles supported complete sets of armour for their war-horses; also saddles and caparisons of beautiful crimson velvet, emblazoned with their family emblems, and rich bridles ornamented with gold broidery befitting the state of such distinguished lords.

Six falcons, hooded and fastened to a silver chain, were perched on a cross-barred stand at a window, with a heap of tackle for hawking; a pursuit much affected by the nobility,

and considered a suitable diversion for gentlemen.

After some minutes, Signor Prospero Colonna appeared at the door, and everybody made way for and saluted him. He, advancing and bowing with stately grace, settled himself in a large red leathern arm-chair at the head of a table, where he kept his writing materials, and made a courteous sign to all to be seated.

He was dressed in a short cloak of black arabesque stuff, with a thick gold chain round his neck, from which depended over his bosom an artistically engraved medallion of the same precious metal. He wore a dagger in a black wrought-steel belt; and, in this modest attire, his striking presence, set off by his pale brown face crowned with a high forehead indicative of unusual sense and power, inspired that reverence which is wont to be paid as a tribute to superiority of mind rather than to the favours of birth and fortune. He had thick

eyebrows, and a short Spanish beard; and the careless but observant glance which he cast around, proclaimed him a potent and influential seignior.

The present occasion seemed to him one of supreme importance, not only because it was a question of vindicating the honour of the Italian arms, but because, under the existing circumstances of two powerful monarchs warring with uncertain fortunes, the issue of this faction might be pregnant with serious consequences for himself, his house, and the Colonna party. Should his banner come off victorious, great reputation would accrue to it, as this challenge would certainly be renowned far and wide; therefore, the conqueror (captain whether of the French or Spanish host), would, after the conclusion of this feat of arms, be more cautious in offending him, and would have greater interest in keeping on friendly terms with him. Besides, it is notorious how obstinate had been the feud in the

Roman territory between the Colonna and Orsini parties; both of them had been weakened by the violence and intrigues of Alexander VI. and Cesar Borgia, and were on the look-out for some favourable opportunity to retrieve their position either by their own valour or foreign intervention; so now, if ever, was the time to snatch at the prize which Fortune, by a sudden turn of her wheel, presented for his acceptance. The sagacious condottiere was well aware of Fieramosca's enthusiastic spirit, and of his patriotism and thirst for glory. He noticed that his speech often had the effect of stirring up his comrades to prove their manhood as Italians; and he felt how invaluable at this crisis his *example* might be in promoting, and his *words* in kindling, that divine ardour which makes men capable of great deeds.

Therefore, as he began to speak, he turned towards him, and said that he was already, to some extent, acquainted with what had oc-

curred, but he wished to receive a more circumstantial report, so as to be able to take some immediate steps. Ettore gave an account of it, enlarging on the part Inigo had taken in standing up for the Italian nation. When he had concluded, Signor Prospero, rising, spoke as follows :

"Illustrious knights! were you other than you are, or had I not had personal experience of your valour from bearing you company in so many battles, I might perhaps have deemed it needful to remind you to what a dazzling height our ancestors, by their sublime actions, raised the glory of our country in the eyes of the world; nor have the darkness and misfortunes of ten centuries prevailed to dim its lustre. *Then* the name of Rome sufficed to inspire fear into those ultramontanes who *now* come and imbrue themselves in Italian blood, and, still insatiate, add insult to injury. I should tell you that their shameless insolence has risen to such a pitch, that after having, by

their artifices, ravished the glorious crown which constituted Italy the Queen of Nations, and which was bought with so much sweat and blood, they look upon their work as incomplete so long as they see us with a sword in our hands, or cuirass on our breasts; and they even grudge us liberty to fight and die in defence of our honour. I should say to you, Up and be doing! let us hasten to fall on these greedy robbers who set all rights at naught! Well do I judge, by your flashing eyes, that my words would lag behind Italian sabres . . . but instead . . . the office of condottiere, hard as it seems on such an occasion, bids me restrain your ardour, and I am obliged to point out to you that all cannot fight, and to a few must be assigned the glory of our vengeance. The magnificent Consalvo, having with inferior forces to maintain the rights of the Catholic King, would not consent to his soldiers' blood being shed in a different cause. I hope to be able to obtain a safe

conduct and free field for ten men-at-arms. I will go, without loss of time, and return as soon as I have obtained it. In the meanwhile, let each of you write a name on a slip of paper; the selection shall be left to Consalvo : but you must first swear to abide by his award."

This address was received with a murmur of approbation, and all pledged themselves accordingly. The names were written, and consigned to Signor Prospero, who, rising from his seat, went to the door where two servants were holding a mule in readiness for him. He mounted and, attended only by these two, wended his way to the fortress.

At the end of half an hour which seemed a century to the impatience of the young men, he returned and, alighting from his mule, entered the hall, every one resuming his former place. The profound silence, as well as the expression of all eyes fixed on the Roman baron, betokened the keenest anxiety to hear on whom the selection had fallen, and also

the secret hope cherished by each to have been included in the list.

"The magnificent Consalvo," said, at length, Signor Prospero, taking the papers out of his bosom and laying them on the table, "professes the greatest satisfaction at your spirited proposition; he is certain your valour will be quite equal to the occasion: he grants you a safe conduct and free field for ten men-at-arms. It was no little trouble obtaining his consent for the number: he only yields the point on account of its importance."

Unfolding the leaf which contained the names of the elected, he read out the following:

"Ettore Fieramosca." He, on hearing himself first named, joyfully pressed the arm of Brancaleone, who was sitting beside him, while the eyes of all turned towards him in acknowledgment of his undisputed right to the first place.

"Romanelli da Forlì.

"Ettore Giovenale, Roman.

"Marco Carellario, Neapolitan.

"Guglielmo Albimonte, Sicilian.

"Miale of Troya.

"Riccio of Parma.

"Francesco Salamone, Sicilian.

"Brancaleone, Roman.

"Fanfulla da Lodi."

The gratified faces of those on whom the lot had fallen might easily have enabled any stranger present to identify them, without any previous knowledge of their persons. Fieramosca's ever pale face flushed a bright crimson, and as he conversed with his companions the tremulousness of the chesnut moustaches which clothed his lips, betrayed how deeply his feelings were stirred. At last, was opened to him a prospect of executing deeds worthy of his most cherished conceptions. "At length," whispered his heart, "Italian blood may flow in a better cause than in the defence of foreign invaders!" If anyone had then said to him,

"Your party will be victorious, but you will fall," he would have declared himself satisfied a thousand times over. However, he had a good hope and almost confidence of winning and enjoying the victory, and, thought he, "Afterwards, what a joyful, glorious, and festive return!" (How seldom is it that man foresees the reality.) He pictured to himself the praise and lasting honour which would attach to his own name and that of Italy, as well as the pride his dearest friends would take in him. At this point, the shadow of a corroding care swept across his countenance, momentarily dispelling the joy with which it had previously been radiant. Perchance it was a sharp sting caused by the bitter recollection of some bygone misfortune. However, it lasted but a moment. Could he at that time entertain a weightier care than that relating to the impending combat?

Prospero Colonna had been chosen by Consalvo to be marshal of the lists. This entailed

on him the obligation of sending the cartel, of properly mounting his partisans, seeing that they wanted for nothing that could ensure victory, and finally watching that nothing was done, on either side, contrary to the rules of fair and legitimate warfare. First of all, the day and place came under discussion. It was still early in the month. It was settled they should fight after the middle, so as to have plenty of time for making due preparations. As for the locality, experts would be deputed to select the most suitable.

After this, the cartel was drawn up and written in French, then consigned to Fieramosca and Brancaleone to carry the same day to the enemy's camp. As soon as these preliminaries were settled, Signor Prospero turned to the ten elected champions and said to them:

"Our honour, gentlemen, rests on the point of your swords, and I cannot conceive its being in better or safer hands; but just on this very account, you must swear not to embark on

any other enterprise before the day of battle, so as to avoid all risk of being wounded, or meeting with any impediment to your appearing that day on horseback. You must see very well, if such a thing were to happen (no matter from what cause), that it would cast a great slur on our party."

Everyone acknowledged this provision to be perfectly reasonable, and none of them made any hesitation in pledging their faith to observe the proposed condition.

In the meantime, the majority of those who saw, with regret, that they had no further part in the matter, had gradually dispersed: only the ten remained. They also cleared out of the hall as soon as the cartel was given into Fieramosca's charge, and the latter, accompanied by Brancaleone, went home and lost no time in getting to horse in order to repair to the French camp.

Having both armed themselves lightly with habergeon, steel armlets, and cap, and taking

with them a trumpeter, they directed their steps to the gate of San Baccolo which opened on to the enemy's position. The portcullis was raised and drawbridge lowered, and so they passed out into a suburb which, after being abandoned by its inhabitants in the prevalent confusion, had been half burnt and destroyed by the license of the soldiery of both parties. Thence the way lay through a succession of market-gardens; afterwards it became more open, and it was about an hour's ride to the camp. In passing through the suburb, Ettore came on some poor women, half covered with rags, who, dragging their famished children along by the hand, or carrying them round the neck, went groping about through the deserted houses to see if anything might have escaped the greed of the soldiers who had sacked them. The young man's heart bled within him at this spectacle; and being unable to help them, as he could not bear the sight of their misery, he put spurs to

his horse and galloped on into the open country. This apparently trivial incident brought on a depressing revulsion in his spirits, which had been unusually elated by joyful anticipation of the coming battle. More ardently than ever, glowed his commiseration for the woes of Italy, and indignation against the French as the authors of them. He could not conceal from Brancaleone, who rode beside him, the compassion he felt for the misery of those wretched women; and he, being in the main a good and charitable man (though rather rough from constant association with danger and bloodshed), chimed in with him in pitying and deploring their troubles.

Fieramosca, seeing him in this frame of mind, said, with a sorrowful shake of the head:

"There is a specimen of the boons these French confer upon us! A prosperous state of things, truly, for which we are indebted to them! But if I could but once see their hate-

ful crew driven over the Alps" . . . he meant to add, "we might then take measures to get rid of the Spaniards also," but he remembered he was in their service, and, breaking off in the middle of the sentence, he finished with a sigh.

Brancaleone took far more interest in the Colonna faction than in his country's welfare, so could not fully enter into his friend's sentiments; however, as he shared them to a certain extent, and after his own fashion, he replied:

"If we could but put this army to rout, we might, before long, have an opportunity of tasting Signor Virginio Orsini's wine; and the cellars of Castle Bracciano would see Christian faces for once in the way. Palestrina, Marino, and Valmontona would be spared the sight of the smoke from his scoundrels' camp-fires. They would not be roused every moment by that hateful cry of 'Orso! Orso!' . . . but . . . every Saturday is not pay-day!"

Ettore held his peace, understanding from this answer that if Brancaleone was of the same mind with him as to the desirableness of the object, yet he was very far from agreeing with him as to motives ; and they walked their horses on for some distance in unbroken silence. The trumpeter preceded them by a bow-shot.

The reader will not have forgotten the French prisoner's allusion to Fieramosca's love affairs. His comrades, who now heard of them for the first time, were greatly concerned at his troubles, both because he was a favourite, and also because in a coterie of young men each one is expected to contribute his quota towards the general good fellowship. Now this morning, while the question of the challenge had been under debate at Signor Prospero's house, his case had likewise been freely discussed, and reached Brancaleone's ears. In general, he felt very little curiosity about other people's affairs; nevertheless, after having rid-

den some way in silence, he felt somewhat put out at his companion's oppressive gloom, and, contrary to his nature, laid himself out to tempt him to open his heart; actually going so far as to use the most friendly entreaties to him to relate the circumstances which were the cause of such excessive melancholy. With considerable adroitness, he succeeded in drawing him out. Fieramosca felt confidence in him, and the exigencies of his position loosed his tongue, for a passion-tossed heart is seldom the safe custodian of a secret. So, slowly raising his eyes to his face, he began:

"Brancaleone, what you ask me, I have never confided to any living soul; nor should I tell you either (don't be indignant) if I did not think I might be killed in the fight . . . and then . . . what would become of . . . yes, yes, you are a true friend, you are a good man; you shall know all. Excuse me if I am somewhat prolix; for so many strange adventures are not to be told in a few words."

Brancaleone gave him a look of satisfaction, whereupon Fieramosca, heaving a resolute sigh, commenced:

"At the time of the first rumours of war on the part of the Very Christian King who threatened a descent on Italy for the conquest of Naples, you know I was a youth of sixteen in the service of the Moor. I took leave, fancying I was bound to risk my life in the defence of the Sovereigns of Raona who had so long governed us. I went to Capua where an army was being organised, and Count Bosio di Monreale, who had charge of the fortifications, told me off for garrison duty. All was in readiness for standing a siege, and for the time being, as there was nothing to do, we gave ourselves up to the pursuit of pleasure. The evenings I spent in the house of the Count, who, being an old friend of my father, treated me as his own son. Formerly, before going off with the Duke of Milan, I had been in the habit of frequenting his house. There I became acquainted with

his young daughter, and children as we were, we entertained a strong affection for one another, without any thought beyond the present. The day I started for Lombardy, many and tearful were the farewells. I remember I rode a jennet (never a better), and as I passed under her window (her name was Ginevra) I made my steed curvet while waving her my adieux. She threw me, unnoticed either by her father or anyone else, as it was barely daylight, a blue ribbon which I have always worn to this day.

"But this was merely a jest. During a year's absence this first love cooled down a good deal.

"When I saw Ginevra again, on my return, she had developed into the most beautiful girl in the country, was remarkably well-informed, and sang to the lute most exquisitely; and again I could not help falling most madly and desperately in love with her. She, meeting me again now that I had gained some repute

in arms, in memory of old times, took great delight (as I could plainly see, though she was too modest to show it) in hearing my descriptions of the Lombard territory, of the wars in which I had served, and of the foreign courts and customs that I had seen; and if her gratification was great in listening to me, much greater was mine in entertaining her; and so it went on till we could not bear to be an hour apart.

"Partly perceiving into what we were drifting, I began to reflect on the trouble we were laying up in store for ourselves. War was imminent. An evil case was his who, at such a juncture, found himself entangled in Love's meshes. And though, in the first instance, I sought every opportunity of being with her, yet when I began to consider what would be my most honourable course (seeing that our love was no joking matter), I retained sufficient strength of mind to struggle against, and try to conceal it. So things went on for a

bit; the conflict within, instead of abating my passion, only added fuel to it. The very effort of putting an outward restraint on it, made it prey on me inwardly, and almost brought on an illness. Already, a gloomy expression had settled on my face. At night, however tired, I could not sleep, and with my thoughts ever centred on her, I used to feel hot tears coursing down my cheeks on to the pillow, and I was quite ashamed of my weakness.

"Thus passed several weeks, till at last I became so reduced that it was necessary to take some decisive step. You already guess what it was. One day towards sunset I found her alone in her garden, and, as fate would have it, I told her of my devotion; but she, blushing, withdrew, without saying a word, leaving me more disconsolate than ever. Thenceforth she seemed to wish to keep me at a distance, and hardly ever addressed me when other people were present. So, in despair, unable to control my unutterable love,

I resolved to go right away, and seek death in the battle-field. Just at that time the Duke of San Nicandro's company happening to pass *en route* for Rome to join the Duke of Calabria, I prepared to accompany it, and, without mentioning my intentions, I tried my chance again with her, but with no better result; so I could only conclude that the love I had fancied she bore me was purely visionary. Quite resolved to start next morning with the Duke's company which was billeted in Capua, I arranged everything so as to be on horseback early next day. I went to spend the evening as usual in the house of Ginevra's father; we three were seated alone round the table playing at *tavola reale*. When I found an opportunity I told him how I had settled to leave next morning; for, having become weary of enforced idleness, I wished to go where I should see more active service, and hoped he would be pleased to sanction my doing so. The Count expressed approbation of my intention, while

I, with some faint lingering hope, watched Ginevra's countenance out of the corner of my eye. Imagine my feelings when I saw her change colour and her eyelids redden. She gave me a furtive glance which revealed her secret. I hesitated about carrying out my plans, but considered I had gone too far to withdraw honourably; and so was obliged, while feeling the happiest and most enviable of mortals, to take my departure. From that inauspicious moment dated all my misfortunes. Oh, had I but fallen down dead when I put my foot in the stirrup! Better would it have been for her and for myself!

"I proceeded to Rome, cursing my ill-luck, and arrived there just the instant when King Charles was entering on one side and our troops were in full retreat on the other. A slight skirmish took place, and I pushed so far forward amongst a party of Swiss, that I was left for dead with two sabre-cuts in my head which took a long time to heal. I re-

ceived these wounds near Velletri, was carried into the town and doctored, and was obliged to remain there two months without learning anything further of Ginevra or her father. I only, from time to time, heard deplorable accounts of the state of the country, which were always exaggerated by the people of the house and mixed up with so much fiction that I could make out nothing satisfactorily.

"However, having at last regained my strength, in the hope of putting an end to this distressing suspense, I, one morning, mounted my horse and rode to Rome. Here everything was in the greatest disorder. Pope Alexander, who had not been over-friendly to the King during his progress (now seeing the ruin brought on the kingdom, and hearing rumours of a league between the Moor and Venetians, which had occasioned the return of the French), became very apprehensive, and fortified Rome and the Castle as well as he could.

"As soon as I had dismounted, I went to pay my respects to Monsignor Capece who received me most warmly, and insisted on carrying me off from the inn.

"Meanwhile the commotion in Rome increased, and the King's vanguard, composed of Swiss, being expected daily, great was the terror and anxiety of everyone for his private interests.

"At length the army appeared. The Pope fled with Valentino to Orvieto. The French were quartered partly in the city and partly outside, in Prati.* They behaved very well to the citizens, so much so that everybody was reassured.

"After a few days' stay, the King advanced towards Tuscany; however, one or other of their bands was perpetually passing through Rome, going about in small detachments, in

* Thus was called a tract of the Campagna near Castle Sant 'Angelo, between the Tiber and Monte Mario.

order to lessen the inconvenience of victualling. By this time all fear had subsided, and business went on much as usual. I was perpetually harassed with the thought of Ginevra, and, as soon as I honourably could, I left Monsignor Capece to return home and gain some information, for all that time I never found an opportunity of speaking with anybody who had any knowledge of her.

"One morning early, I set off, intending to ride that day as far as Citerna, and from the Strada Julia where Monsignor lived, I passed by the Piazza Farnese in the direction of the gate of San Giovanni. Under the Colosseum I encountered a troop of French, with baggage; and as they came near, I saw they were bearing with them a litter in which lay one of their captains badly injured, and from the bandages he wore round his temples it was evident he was wounded in the head. I drew aside, and had reined in my horse to look at him, when I was startled by a sharp cry. I turned round

and saw Ginevra riding along in their company. But oh, how changed! It was a miracle I did not fall off. My heart was bursting beneath my breastplate. Wondering what could be the meaning of it, I pretended to continue on my way. After awhile, I turned my horse's head, and, never losing sight of them, I kept behind till they had reached their quarters.

"As you may well imagine, I was not bold enough to appear before Monsignor, who believed me to be already many miles away, still less to present myself to Ginevra, dreading, if I spoke to her, to learn what it would have been distraction to me to hear. At the same time, anxious to clear up the mystery, I did not know on what to decide. Carried there by the horse whose natural instinct was to return to Monsignor's stables, I found myself by the sewer in Banchi, near the shop of a certain Franciotto, nicknamed *Dalla Barca*, because his profession was to convey merchandise from Ostia to Ripa Grande. He was a great friend

of mine, and as he now came forward to greet me, I got off my horse, and drawing him on one side, told him that for certain reasons I had left Monsignor Capece and was obliged to keep in hiding ; thereupon, he offered me a small house which he had in the suburbs, and immediately took me to it.

" I made up my mind to tell him that I had seen a young lady, with whose family I was acquainted, in the company of some Frenchmen and that I wished to find out how she had come there, in order to help her if there was any occasion for it. I pointed out to him the place where she had alighted, and begged him to get into conversation with one of the servants, and arrange some place where, without making myself known, I could attain my object. Being sharp-witted, he easily found the means of satisfying me. Towards midnight he came for me and took me to a tavern, where we found one of his young men who had inveigled in a squire attached to the

French baron's suite, and, having plied him with drink, had set him off talking. We arrived just in the nick of time.

"Franciotto, putting in a word here and there, led him on to tell what I would have given worlds not to hear. 'A *propos* of the lady, he related that on their arrival at Capua the occupiers made a strenuous resistance, but the town was taken by storm and sacked; that his master Claudio Grajano d'Asti (such was his name, he told us), with several soldiers, entered the house of Count Monreale who had been wounded in the assault and carried there *hors de combat*; that when Grajano reached the room where he was lying, his daughter threw herself on her knees before the intruder, and invoked his pity on herself and her father. He was surly and inclined for mischief; so the Count, raising himself as best he could on his elbow, said earnestly, 'All I possess in the world shall be yours, and you shall have my daughter to wife, if you will

protect her from outrage at the hands of these ruffians.' Ginevra, trembling for her father's life and for herself, made no opposition. Two days afterwards the Count died.

"I bit my fingers at the reflection that if I had been there, she might not have fallen into this villain's power; but there was no help for it. I went out, and all night long wandered about the streets like a madman, and was several times on the point of putting an end to myself; nothing but the grace of God restrained me. Words fail to describe the thousandth part of the grief and tumult which ran riot in my heart, making it beat so violently I felt I must be suffocated. Shrinking from the prospect of a blighted life, I formed the most insane projects you can conceive. One moment I purposed killing the husband; the next, meeting death myself in some strange manner, so as to show Ginevra I had been driven to that step through love for her; and I consoled myself with the idea of the sorrow

it would cause her. My brain was distracted and nearly turned by these conflicting schemes.

"After passing several days in this manner, I determined to tempt fortune. Enveloped in my cloak, my face shaded by the hood which came down over my eyes, I went to her door and knocked. A maid came to the window and asked what I wanted. 'Tell Madonna,' I answered, 'that a man wants to speak to her who comes from Naples and brings her news of her people.' I was admitted, and left in a room on the ground floor, with a small lamp which gave but very little light. One instant I felt as though I were standing at the gate of Paradise; the next as though I were plunged in the depths of Hell; and so great was the reaction, that my knees tottered, and I was obliged to sink down into a seat. I waited a few minutes which seemed to me a thousand years. When I heard the sound of Ginevra's footstep and the rustle of her dress on the staircase, all my strength seemed to ooze out

of me. She entered, and stood at a little distance looking at me; and would you believe it? I could neither speak, nor move, nor find my voice; but hardly had she recognised me when she shrieked, and would have fallen fainting on the floor had I not caught her in my arms. In this predicament, fearful of discovery, I unlaced her dress, and did my best to revive her by sprinkling her forehead with water from a wine-cooler which was at hand. But the burning tears which rained from my eyes and bathed her neck, possessed more efficacy in recalling her to life. All I could do was to take one of her hands, and press my lips on it with such passion that I thought my soul was passing away at that moment. So we remained for a time. At length, trembling all over, she disengaged herself from me, and in an almost inaudible voice murmured: 'Ettore, if you did but know in what desperate straits I have been!' . . . 'I do know, only too well,' I answered, 'and I have no

other wish but to die near you, and see you sometimes while I am alive.'

"Just then a noise was heard on the floor above. I felt my blood curdle at the notion that we might be surprised, and her troubles in consequence increased. Taking leave more by gestures than words, I hastened away, and left the house somewhat less miserable and disconsolate.

"Meanwhile, her husband's wound did not heal, and many French gentlemen and prelates visited him every day. Though Ginevra's striking face showed signs of inward heart-ache, her beauty, chastened by a certain languid pallor, was of such an order, that no one could see and remain insensible to it; her youth, manners, and angelic features excited so much admiration among those gentlemen, that they never tired of singing her praises on every occasion; consequently, the fame of her fascinations reached Valentino's ears. Many were the tales whispered about him in Rome. Not

a month before, his brother, the Duke of Candia, had been murdered in the streets at night, and no slight suspicion rested on him as the author of the crime; anyhow, he immediately divested himself of the purple to embrace the profession of a soldier, and such things were said of him that one really did not know what to think. From that time forth I had reason to believe he was courting Ginevra, and I often overheard unseemly remarks made by the common people, which respect for her prevented me from openly resenting. I fumed with rage, but kept it as much as possible to myself, so as not to betray my feelings. In the meantime, under one pretext or another, I likewise had fallen into the habit of going to the house and holding intercourse with her husband; and though the sight of him stirred my passions beyond measure, yet I bore it willingly, and would have borne anything, provided I might see her from time to time; but, from first to last, I never addressed one single

word of love to her, for knowing her as well as I did, I was quite convinced it would only have been waste of breath.

"Grajano d'Asti was one of those ordinary individuals, neither handsome nor ugly, neither good nor bad; an undeniably good soldier, but one who would serve the Turk if he offered the best pay. Ginevra's property made him tolerably rich, and he valued her as one values an estate, for the income and for no other motive.

"Several weeks passed. I could see Ginevra in the evening, for her husband entertained no suspicions about me; and love-making not being much in his line, besides being distracted by his wound which was long in closing, his thoughts were otherwise engaged; so I was a good deal in her company.

"In the course of time, Valentino, wishing to collect a force for the campaign in Romagna, proposed engaging Grajano d'Asti who was sufficiently recovered to be able shortly to take

horse again. I knew that he had made overtures to him, and they soon came to terms. They arranged for a troop of twenty-five lances, and Ginevra's husband seemed to obtain very good conditions.

"One evening the Duke went to Grajano's house to make his final stipulations; a little supper was prepared, at which were present some French prelates and some free-lances who were unemployed and intended enlisting under his banner, for he accepted all comers.

"I had half a mind to offer my services, in order to follow Ginevra's fortunes with those of Grajano; however, I cannot tell you why, I made no move in the matter, nor was I with them that evening. It was already dark, and I went roaming about the most deserted parts of Rome, racking my brains with endless suspicions, and unable to shake off the strangest misgivings. For several days past, I had noticed that Ginevra was more dejected than ever, and I fancied I every now and then detected, flit-

ting across her countenance, the shadow of some secret she was at pains to conceal. I passed that night in a state of frenzy. Listen, and then say if there is no truth in presentiments!

"The next day I called on her an hour before sunset. As I approached the door, I heard an unusual murmur within; a priest of Araceli was coming out with the Bambino,* preceded by a torch. I sprang into the house with a sudden chill at my heart, and the maid-servant said to me, 'Madonna is at the point of death.'

"The previous evening, she had been seized after supper with a fainting fit, but it did not appear to be an attack of any consequence. She was put to bed and soothed with hot cloths, there she lay quiet till morning; when the sun rose she was insensible. A certain

* The Bambino of Araceli, reputed to have miraculous powers, is carried to dying people.

Maestro Jacopo di Montebuono, who dabbled in medicine, came and found her almost cold; the wretch, instead of adopting stringent measures, went away, just saying she ought to be left quiet; returning later, he got frightened, and, crying out that it was all over with her, had the priest fetched, without applying any remedies to alleviate or subdue this inexplicable malady. Shortly after the Ave Maria, the disconsolate household heard from the doctor's own lips that she had passed away."

The French encampment now appeared in sight, and Ettore was obliged to interrupt his story. The trumpeter advanced blowing a blast, and a mounted soldier came forward to inquire his business.

Having ascertained the object of their visit, he notified it to the officer of the guard, who, when he saw the letter which Consalvo had written to the Duc de Nemours, captain of the post, desired Brancaleone and Fieramosca to wait while he despatched a messenger to the

Duke to obtain permission for them to enter the camp.

Meantime, he offered them a tent which served as a guard-house for the gate; but the two friends, hearing that the captain's quarters were still at some distance, resolved to wait where they were, till the messenger returned with the answer.

Hard by stood a group of oaks, overshadowing a plot of fresh grass, which offered a delightful resting-place during those burning hours of noon. The two warriors repaired thither, and tying their horses to the trees, they bared their foreheads, and sat side by side, leaning their shoulders against the trunks. A light sea-breeze fanned their brows, and, thus invigorated, the one resumed his tale with fresh animation, and the other listened with revived interest.

CHAPTER V.

LOVE 'S A MIGHTY LORD.

"Shake off this downy sleep—death's counterfeit."
Macbeth.

"Death that hath sucked the honey of thy breath
Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty:
Thou art not conquered; beauty's ensign yet
Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,
And death's pale flag is not advanced there."
Romeo and Juliet.

FIERAMOSCA continued his narrative, as follows:

"Having lost Ginevra, I had nothing else in the world to care for. I left the house, my eyes heavy with unshed tears. I could hardly have told you what I did or where I went in

those first moments of desperation, had not subsequent events in some measure enlightened me. I wandered about in a state of stupefaction, feeling as you know one often does after receiving a severe blow on the helmet from an iron mace, when for a short time one's ears buzz, and everything seems to turn round before one's eyes. Thus, hardly conscious of what had happened, I passed over the bridge. (Ginevra's house was near Torre di Nona), and by the Borgo, I proceeded into the Piazza di San Pietro. My faithful Franciotto, having some inkling of my misfortune, came to look for me, and found me prostrate at the foot of a column; how I came there is more than I can say; I felt two arms passed under my shoulders, supporting and placing me in a sitting posture; then I came round, and saw him beside me. He began to comfort me with loving words, and so by degrees I recovered my senses. He helped me to rise, and, with considerable difficulty, led me home, undressed

and put me to bed; then sat down by my pillow, and remained quiet, abstaining from annoying me with talk or consolations which would have been quite out of season.

"We passed the night thus without opening our mouths. A severe fever had set in, which at intervals affected my brain, and my diseased imagination conjured up the semblance of a monstrous figure, clad in armour, squatting on my chest, and I felt as though I should be suffocated.

"Finally, overwrought nature was relieved by tears. It was striking 10 by the Castle clock,* and the first rays of dawn were entering through the chinks of the window-shutter. I had from the first hung my sword and other arms against the wall; raising my eyes, they fell on the blue shoulder-belt which Ginevra

* The reader must bear in mind that in Italy the day, consisting of twenty-four hours, begins at Ave Maria which is regulated by sunset.

had given me some years previously; this sight set free my pent-up tears which, starting like the bolt from a crossbow, began to flow in torrents, and by removing the oppression on my chest, saved my life. After allowing them free course for about an hour, I felt relieved, and could listen and talk; good Franciotto's attempts to cheer me wiled away the day, and towards evening I wished to rise.

"As I gradually became composed, I considered how to face this calamity. After turning it over in my mind (quite persuaded in my despair that surviving her was out of the question, and that no death would be so insupportable as to pine away, inch by inch, with grief), I resolved to die at once, and wing my flight after that sainted soul. Having come to this conclusion, I felt a sort of mournful satisfaction at the prospect, and was much easier in my mind.

"Franciotto, who had been with me since the previous evening, went out for a moment

to attend to the shop, and promised to return immediately. Placing my hand on my dagger (it is this very one I have by my side now), I was about to effect my purpose on the spot; but, on second thoughts, recollecting that this would be the evening of Ginevra's burial, I was seized with a craving to see her once more, and die near her. So, half dressed, having girded on my sword, and taking with me my most valued possession, the blue shoulder-belt, I went out.

"Just beyond the bridge, I came upon the funeral procession. The regular priests walked two and two, and several companies of Brotherhoods, singing the *Miserere*, passed along the via Julia and ponte Sisto, carrying the bier which was covered with a large velvet pall. I must tell you I was not in the least dismayed at this sight; but with the conviction that we should be united, if not in life, at least in death, that we were both journeying to the same bourn, and that one chamber was about

to receive us both, I followed full of frenzied joy, paying no heed to the way we were going, and rapt in spirit to the exclusion of all sublunary matters. After passing over Ponte Sisto and through the Trasterere, we entered Santa Cecilia.

"When the bier was deposited in the sacristy which contains the tomb of the son of Santa Francesca Romana, I stood aside leaning against the wall while the friars were singing the last obsequies. At last the Requiescat in Pace resounded beneath the vault.

"All silently departed, and I remained alone, almost in the dark; there was no other light than the lamp burning before the Madonna. I heard in the distance the whisperings and footsteps of people who were going out; then the clock chimed the first hour of the night, and the sacristan walked through the church, jingling his bunch of keys, and made preparations for closing.

"He saw me as he passed by, and said, 'I

am going to shut up.' I answered, 'I shall remain.'

"Giving me a significant glance, he said, 'Oh, you are the Duke's man? You need not have been so anxious . . . the door will remain ajar; but since you are here, I will go about my own business.' And without further parley, he took his departure.

"I did not pay much attention to him; however, those words struck me, and I wondered which of us was dreaming, he or I. What duke? what about a door ajar? what does the wretch mean? I thought to myself.

"However, very far from guessing the truth, and incapable just then of much reasoning, I soon returned to my foregone resolution, and after a short space of time, everything around being quiet, with a death-like shudder I approached the bier.

"After removing the cloth which covered it, I drew my dagger which was strong and sharp, and set to work to break open the

coffin. With no other means than this at hand, I found considerable difficulty in raising the heads of the nails; but by dint of perseverance I succeeded in taking off the lid.

"The beautiful corpse was clothed in the whitest linen, and enveloped in a sheet. I felt a desire to look at my angel's face again before dying. I knelt down and began to unwrap the veils which shut me out from that sole remaining source of consolation. I raised the last fold, and Ginevra's face became visible. She looked like a wax statue. Trembling all over, I laid my face on hers, and stealthily, for it seemed to me to be a crime, I could not resist kissing her lips. The lips slightly quivered! I started back electrified. 'Omnipotent God!' I cried, 'even that miracle is in the power of Thy mercy to accomplish!' I laid my fingers on her pulse. The beating of my heart impeded my respiration. Her pulse beat feebly! Ginevra was alive!

"But just conceive my dismay at finding

myself alone under such circumstances! 'If she recovers consciousness,' I thought, 'while still in this place, the fright alone would be enough to kill her!' I did not know what to do, and raved aloud. I turned with my arms stretched out towards the Madonna, and prayed: 'Oh! true Mother of God, grant that I may be able to save her, for I swear to Thee by Thy divine Son that I harbour no thought of evil in my mind.' Then in my heart I made a solemn vow that if I succeeded in restoring her to life, never would I tempt her to forget her duty to her husband, and, now and for ever, would forego my intention of killing him, as it had before been my settled purpose sooner or later to do.

"In answer to this heartfelt petition Heaven in its mercy vouchsafed speedy succour.

"Franciotto, who had left the house, as I told you, on his return saw me going towards the bridge, and followed me, partly guessing the truth, besides fearing, as he told me after-

wards, that I might do something desperate. But he discreetly avoided, as much as possible, speaking to or disturbing me in those moments of anguish, well aware that help (in any emergency that might arise) would be far more to the purpose than advice. He entered the church with the others, and remained hidden in a dark corner. He has often told me since that when he saw me lay hold of my dagger, he was prepared to spring out and seize me by the arms; and kept on the alert, so as not to be too late in reaching me. Perceiving, however, that my only anxiety was to open the coffin, he stood still, and only discovered himself to me when he saw occasion for his services. Hardly had I finished my prayer when I heard his footsteps. I turned round and found him close by me. Still kneeling, and regarding him as the saviour of both our lives, I embraced his knees as though he were an angel come down from heaven. I then rose, and considered what would be the best plan to

adopt for removing the lady gently and without discomfort. In the end, we took the velvet pall which had covered the bier and turned it inside out, so that if she recovered her senses she might not notice on what a dismal sort of couch she was lying. We then arranged the sheets in which she was wound, so as to make the best bed available, and hastily lifting her out of the coffin, we gently laid her on the wrappers.

"Poor Ginevra had not opened her eyes, but a broken sigh occasionally escaped her. Franciotto hunted through the cupboards, and fortunately found the bottle containing wine for the celebration of Mass, and, by putting its slender neck between her lips, we succeeded in making her swallow a few drops to keep up her strength; only a little though, as a stimulus, for we did not wish her to regain consciousness in this place. Then we took hold most carefully of the borders of the pall, and (I at the head and Franciotto at the foot)

raised it without accident, thanks to the Holy Virgin, carried her out of church, and, by way of San Michele, we reached Ripa, where the boats are moored. Amongst them was one belonging to Franciotto. On the spur of the moment, we did not know where to find a better or safer place. We lifted Ginevra in, and after having, with the assistance of two or three men in charge of the boat, improvised a sort of bed for her under cover, I sat down beside her while Franciotto ran for a friend of his, an honest and trustworthy man, to come and see what he could do for her, and draw blood, if necessary.

"He had to pass again by Santa Cecilia, where he remarked a company of armed men drawn up before the door. At first he thought it was the Court: he glided quietly along the wall till he contrived to get near enough to ascertain that it certainly was not the Court. There were thirty armed men in all, carrying pikes and broadswords. A little apart, an

empty litter was borne by two men. The individual who appeared to be their guide stood looking towards the church, shrouded in his mantle, and impatiently shifting from one foot to the other. Before long two servants, apparently, came out, approached him, and said: 'Your Excellency, the coffin is broken open and empty!' These words had such an effect upon him, that, disengaging himself from his cloak, he struck one servant, with a lantern he held beneath it, such a violent blow on the head, that he felled him to the ground; and if the other had not taken to his heels he would have fared still worse, for his lord had already clapped his hand to his sword. After a considerable amount of raving, he was obliged ignominiously to take his departure.

"Franciotto had remarked, in the midst of the armed men, a fellow in a court mantle and cape, and, by the light of their torches, recognised him as the scoundrel Maestro Jacopo da Montebuono. His presence in such a place,

and in such company, gave rise to strange suspicions.

"When they had started off he kept at a respectful distance behind, and, instead of going for the barber, formed designs on the above-mentioned Maestro Jacopo. His only fear was lest he should get some of his accomplices to escort him home. However, as luck would have it, he lived at the beginning of the Longara, and when they reached Ponte Sisto, having such a short way to go, he left the others to pass over the bridge, while he wended his way homewards. Franciotto joined him under the arch, and telling him there was nothing to fear, begged of him to go with him to Ripa Grande, where a girl was lying at the point of death; and after some persuasion he brought him to us.

"As soon as he had got under cover, he instantly recognised me and Ginevra, and saw that he had fallen into a trap. Franciotto drew me on one side, and related what he had

seen and heard in front of Santa Cecilia. This set me off thinking; the veil was torn from my eyes, and it flashed across me how it had all happened.

"Giving Maestro Jacopo a significant squeeze, by dint of threats I made him confess (for he was an arrant coward) that on the evening of the supper, he had, by Valentino's orders, given the lady a drugged wine, which had the effect of putting her to sleep; and he, aiding the deception, had pronounced her dead, so that the Duke might conveniently carry her off at night from the church.

"It was a signal miracle that so well-contrived a plot had failed, and you may imagine how I blessed God for it.

"I then turned to Maestro Jacopo and said to him, 'Listen to me, Maestro Jacopo, I might kill you with this dagger, but I will grant you your life on condition that you save this lady's; therefore employ all your skill, if you wish to return to your precious crew. If afterwards

you tell any living soul the upshot of this affair, I will kill you like a dog.'

"The Maestro, in a great state of alarm, promised all I wished, and paid the lady the most assiduous attention; whereupon, after taking counsel with Franciotto, I had the boat unmoored, and we dropped down the river together to Magliana, just after midnight.

"The good Maestro took care never to open his lips on the subject.

"In the meantime Ginevra regained consciousness, opened her eyes, and gazed round with astonishment. Satisfied now that her life was safe, I felt as though I had worked a miracle, and was thanking God most heartily on my knees beside her pillow in the little room to which we had taken her, belonging to a wine dresser. After a while, she withdrew one of her hands which I was pressing to my forehead, and every now and then to my lips, and, raising the hair which fell over my eyes,

she looked me steadily in the face. At last she said, 'Oh, are not you my Ettore? . . . but why here? . . . where are we? . . . it is not like my room . . . I am in a strange bed . . . Oh, what can have happened!'

"At this moment, Franciotto, who looked in every now and then to see how things were going on, appeared at the door. Ginevra gave a shriek, and throwing herself into my arms, exclaimed, trembling, 'Help me Ettore, there he is! there he is! Holy Virgin, help me!' I did my best to reassure her, but all in vain; and in the extremity of her terror at the sight of good Franciotto, her eyes seemed starting out of her head. Perceiving her mistake, I said, 'Ginevra, don't be frightened, it is not the Duke; only a very dear friend of mine who is anxious to do you all the good in his power.'

"You should have seen how she laid aside all fear at these words, and turned graciously to Franciotto, as though to entreat his forgive-

ness. Imagine how I hated that villain from the bottom of my heart!

"Ginevra then began to ask me to explain how she came to be in her present situation. I begged her for the time being to be satisfied to put faith in me, and only attend to her health which required perfect rest. At length I succeeded in calming her, and towards morning, after I had administered a cordial to her, she fell asleep.

"But I did not sleep. I knew very well it was sheer folly to expect her to stay with me; that in despite of me, and possibly to the disgust of her husband, she would insist on returning to him as soon as her strength allowed of it; so I quickly despatched Franciotto to Rome to learn the state of things there, and also how much had transpired concerning the matter.

"He returned towards evening with the news that Valentino had gone off with his partisans in the direction of Romagna, and taken

Grajano and his company with him. Nothing was known about what enterprise he had in view.

"I communicated this to Ginevra who, after hearing from me what had happened to her, wavered in her mind as to what course to adopt. Strenuously, I pointed out to her that on no account ought she to return to Rome, where Valentino could easily find her and make up for his late failure; that her husband, engrossed in his own affairs and devoted to the Duke's interests, could not well protect her, even if he wished; besides, how was he to be traced? I entreated her most affectionately not to run counter to an interposition of Providence which had reunited us by such singular means, and removed her from a position full of snares and perils; to consider that, by reason of her supposed death, we might easily depart, and go unsuspected to some place where, in freedom and tranquillity, we might wait at any rate till we saw what turn her own and her hus-

band's fortunes would take; and to raise her confidence in me, I made this solemn protestation:

"'Ginevra, I swear to the Holy Virgin that you shall be as sacred to me as my own sister.'

"Franciotto was equally urgent, so much so that at last Ginevra, unable to stifle entirely all qualms of conscience, said to me, with a deep sigh, 'Ettore, I will be guided by you, and it rests with you to show that Heaven, and no evil agency, has sent you to me.'

"This point settled, with my hand on my dagger, I gave the Maestro another little lecture, and then sent him back to Rome, accompanied by Franciotto, from whom I parted with much regret. We embarked with our few goods and chattels, and sailed down the Tiber as far as Ostia, thence we directed our steps by land towards Gaeta. The kingdom of Naples was still in the hands of the French, and Valentino being on friendly terms with them, I did not feel safe from him until we had left

them far behind. I therefore hastened to withdraw from those coasts by constantly travelling as fast as was possible without overfatigue to Ginevra, and one evening we safely arrived at Messina, where I fervently thanked God for having delivered us from so many perils."

At this point of his story, Fieramosca noticed that there was a movement in the French camp, and that several horsemen were approaching to escort them, so he added:

"There is a good deal else I could tell you, but there is no time, for they are on their way towards us. But to conclude: we passed about two years in that city. Ginevra retired into a convent, and I (giving myself out to be her brother) visited her as often as I could.

"After this lapse of time, war broke out between the French and Spaniards, and at length the life I was leading seemed to me unworthy of a soldier and an Italian.

"Bound as I was by the vow I had made in

Santa Cecilia, I could not hope for a virtuous conclusion to our attachment.

"All Italy was up in arms; the French appeared to be the strongest, and besides being induced by my spirit of patriotism to side against whichever enemy was the most dangerous, I had an old grudge against the French and their insolence. Moreover, to tell the truth, I saw greater safety for Ginevra under shelter of the flag of Spain, where she would be out of Valentino's reach.

"Ginevra acknowledged the force of these arguments, and being of a spirited nature, she could not bear, notwithstanding her love for me, that I should hang back while a blow was to be struck for the fortunes of Italy; so having made up our minds to it, I wrote to Signor Prospero Colonna who was levying troops for Consalvo, and enlisted under his banner.

"At that time he was with his company at Manfredonia, so we left Messina and took ship

for that place. On the voyage a strange accident happened to us.

"We had landed at Taranto, and after having rested there, we left the port one morning to proceed to Manfredonia. It was the month of May, and there was a thick mist; our barque, with two lateen sails and twelve oars, flew over the sea which was as smooth as a table. At noon four ships bore down within bow-shot, and hailed us. I wished to elude them, and we could have done so, for the wind was favourable, but on the consideration that their artillery might do us some injury, I thought it best to heave-to.

"They were Venetian vessels from Cyprus, escorting Catherine Cornaro, Queen of that island, to Venice. Having ascertained our errand, they gave us no annoyance, and we continued our voyage in their wake.

"It was already night, the fog increased, and I thought it great luck to have fallen in with them, as they would be a sort of guide

to prevent us losing our course in the darkness.

"Near midnight Ginevra was asleep, and two men only were standing about to set the sails and steer the boat; but even they every now and then dozed off. I was keeping watch, seated in the prow, deep in thought. Everything was quiet. I thought I heard men's footsteps on the deck of the Queen's yacht which preceded us by about half a bow-shot. I heard subdued but evidently excited and angry voices; I listened atttentively; a woman's tones mingled with the others and seemed to be imploring mercy. Then followed repeated outbursts of smothered wailing, and finally I heard a plunge in the deep as of a falling body. I rose with great misgivings, and, as I strained my eyes, thought I saw something white floating in the water. I jumped into the sea, and in four strokes came up to it, seized the hem of a dress, and taking it between my teeth, returned to the boat

dragging a body after me. My men had been roused by the noise; they helped me and my burden in. We found a girl in her chemise only, her hands cruelly tied with a rope, and giving no signs of life. By timely attentions we succeeded in bringing her round. We dropped behind the Venetians who continued their voyage without troubling themselves about us, and, striking sail, we quietly waited for daybreak. As soon as the sun rose the weather cleared, and in a few hours we reached Manfredonia where I found Signor Prospero, and lodged Ginevra with the rest of the party at the inn.

"Now you will want to know who this girl was whom we rescued from the sea, but I cannot satisfy you, for I do not know myself. Neither Ginevra nor I have ever succeeded in extracting from her one word concerning her adventures or past life. She was born in the Levant, and is certainly a Saracen, and the most loyal, straightforward, and amiable of

women; at the same time so proud and bold, that she is not the least dismayed at the sight of either arms or bloodshed; and in the presence of danger is more like a man than a woman. From that day forth she has remained with Ginevra, and I arranged with the Abbess of Santa Orsola to receive them both into her convent, where, now that the war keeps us shut up in Barletta, I can visit them tolerably often, as it is close at hand."

CHAPTER VI.

THE FRENCH CAMP.

"Here 's the challenge, read it; I warrant there 's vinegar and pepper in it."

Twelfth Night.

"He stood alone—a renegade
Against the country he betrayed."

Siege of Corinth.

The French, who were to conduct them to the camp, coming up at this moment, the two friends rose and accompanied them on horseback. They passed through the midst of long rows of tents and pavilions, gazing as they went along at the attire of those foreigners

who, curious to learn their purpose in coming, swarmed on every side of them. Surrounded by a crowd of soldiers, they emerged on a square formed by several pavilions; that belonging to the Captain being erected in the middle, under a large oak. At this point, the flower of the chiefs of the army had congregated. The envoys dismounted, and were admitted. After brief but courteous greetings, two stools were brought to them, on which they sat down with their backs to the door.

The tent, covered with a blue cloth spangled with gold lilies, was in the form of an oblong square, divided into two equal compartments by four slender wooded pillars striped blue and gold. At the far end was the bed, over which was thrown a leopard skin on which two greyhounds were stretched out asleep. It was very evident from the appearance of a table a little way off, littered with bottles, brushes, necklets, jewels, and above which hung a polygonal mirror framed in chased silver, that the

amiable Duke did not disdain the cares of the toilette; and although a modern dandy would have searched in vain on this dressing-table for the indispensable eau-de-cologne, he would nevertheless have found an equivalent in two large silver-gilt vases on which were written *Eau de Citrebon* and *Eau Dorée*. Several styles of armour were hung like trophies against the pillars, and lances and javelins were arranged crosswise on hooks.

Below these, in the centre, sat Louis d'Armagnac, Duc de Nemours, Viceroy of Naples, selected by King Louis XII. to be Captain of the Forces. He was dressed in a blue mantle lined with sable, and his noble features beamed with youth, courage and chivalrous courtesy. D'Aubigné, Ivo d'Alegre, Bayard, Mgr. de la Palisse, Chandenier and others, stood on either side of him, while several barons and knights of less note were grouped round in a ring which enclosed Ettore and Brancaleone in its circle. The latter was more competent to use his

hands than to make an harangue, so to Ettore he left the responsibility of expounding their errand.

The young man rose, and cast round the bystanders a rapid glance breathing of hardihood without a shade of insolence, such as befitted the place, audience, and his commission. He reported La Mothe's insult, proposed the challenge, and, to fulfil the usual formalities, he unfolded the cartel and read aloud the following formula:

"Haut et puissant Seigneur Louis d'Armagnac duc de Nemours.

"Ayant apprins que Guy de la Mothe en présence de D. Ynigo Lopez de Ayala a dit que les gens d'armes Italiens etaient pauvres gens de guerre; sur quoi, avec vostre bon plaisir, nous respondons qu'il a meschamment menti, et mentira toutes fois et quant qu'il dira telle chose. Et pour ce, demandons qu'il vous plaise nous octroyer le champ à toute outrance pour nous et les nostres, contre lui et les siens, à nombre egal, dix contre dix.

"Die viii Aprilis MDIII.,

"PROSPERO COLONNA.

"FABRITIO COLONNA."

After reading the cartel, he threw it in the midst at the Duke's feet, and Bayard, unsheathing his sword, picked it up on the point. Ettore then, making a slight pause in his speech, was about to conclude when his eye fell on a very bright shield which was hanging up in front of him, and reflected those who were behind his back; in it he perceived the image of Grajano d'Asti. Struck dumb for a moment, he turned round, and about two paces off saw Ginevra's husband standing with the others listening to him. This sudden, unexpected discovery deprived the end of his speech of that vigour with which he would fain have impressed it. Those to whom the circumstances were unknown put a wrong interpretation on this incident, to the disparagement of Fieramosca's honour. Some of the French warriors smiled, and some even whispered that there was not much to fear from a man whose heart appeared to fail him at the mere allusion to blows. The young man noticed both the

words and action, and his face became aflame; but he consoled himself with the reflection, "When I am put to the proof they will see if I flinch."

The Duke's answer was couched in a tone of the greater audacity, as he likewise surmised from the Italian's aspect that he was not over and above courageous.

In a few minutes the parley came to an end, and the Envoys found refreshment for themselves and their horses in an adjacent tent.

Grajano had also recognised Fieramosca, and followed him when he left the Duke's presence. He approached and saluted him in the careless style affected by those who value the endowments of fortune more than those of virtue; he had known him formerly in a poor estate, and thought he did not seem to have bettered himself much since they last met, so he addressed him thus:

"Oh, Ser Giovanni . . . no! Ser Matteo . . . what the devil's your name? I can't

recollect . . . however, no matter! . . . and so we have lived to meet again!"

"Just so," answered Fieramosca, who, in spite of the generosity of his character, could not repress a feeling of disgust at seeing one whom he believed to be in the other world, alive, and lawful possessor of the being whom he loved more than his life. He made a great effort to prevent the "just so" sounding so dry, but in vain, and he said no more. Grajano was not the sort of man to notice these fine shades; finding the conversation flag, he resumed:

"And so what are we doing? in the service of Spain? eh!"

Ettore considered that these questions in the plural savoured too much of impertinence, and answered:

"What are we doing? I don't know what *you* are about. *I* am one of Signor Prospero's free-lances."

"Eh! take heed to the proverb," said the

Piedmontese, laughing, "*Orsin, Colonna and Frangipani exact their dues to-day and pay them to-morrow.*"

This saying was then current among the Italian soldiers of fortune, and originated from the frequently straitened means of the Roman barons, who were in consequence more greedy of gain for themselves than punctual in disbursing their own soldiers' pay.

Fieramosca felt disinclined for jesting at that moment, so took no notice of this remark; however, not to seem ungracious, he made inquiries concerning his present position, and his reasons for parting from Valentino.

"Oh!" replied Grajano, "because he wants too much, and has too many irons in the fire, and if the Pope were to die to-day or to-morrow, they would be all down upon him, and make him pay up both principal and interest. But enough! he is a gentleman of whom the least said the better. I have now taken up my quarters here, and am so satisfied with

them that I would not change with the Pope."

During this conversation they had reached the tent, where they found breakfast laid out. After they had finished and the table was cleared, there came a summons for them from the Duke to receive the answer.

This was, of course, replete with pride and braggadocio. The French were ready to fight; they wished for thirteen instead of ten; the former number, being considered unlucky, was chosen as a presage of misfortune to the Italians.

A closed letter was consigned to the envoys for Consalvo, and, separately, a list of combatants selected for the French party.

Thus dismissed, they returned to the pavilion while waiting for their horses. In the meantime, bottles of wine made their appearance, and they drank in company with several knights, among whom was Bayard who requested Fieramosca to let him see the list.

Ettore took it out of his bosom and handed it to him; then, impelled by curiosity, all pressed round Bayard, who read out the following names:

"Charles de Tourges.

"Marc de Frignes.

"Giraut de Forses.

"Martellin de Lambris.

"Pierre de Liaye.

"Jacques de Fontaine.

"Eliot de Barand.

"Jean de Landes.

"Sacet de Jacet.

"Guy de la Mothe.

"Jacques de Guignes.

"Naute de la Fraise.

"Claude Grajan d'Asti."

"Claudio Grajano d'Asti!" exclaimed Fieramosca, looking at him with astonishment.

"Yes! Claudio Grajano d'Asti," returned he; "do you think I am not as big and strong as the others?"

"But tell me, Messer Claudio, are you aware how this challenge originated?"

"What! do you think I'm deaf? Of course I know all about it."

"You know, then, that the Italians are accused by the French of cowardice and treachery, and that is why we are going to fight. Now, then, tell me to what country do you belong?"

"I hail from Asti."

"And is not Asti in Piedmont? and is Piedmont Italy or France? and you, being an Italian, do you mean to fight on the side of the French, against a cause in which your national honour is concerned?"

Fieramosca's eyes flashed as he uttered these words; he would have made use of still stronger expressions, but he remembered his vow which forbad him to lay hands on this man.

Grajano, who was very far from being of Fieramosca's way of thinking, could not at first understand at what he was driving with

all these questions, and barely took it in when he had finished, thinking it the greatest nonsense he had ever heard; so, without vouchsafing a direct or sensible answer, he turned to the others and said, laughing:

"Just listen to him! One would suppose it to be the first day of his handling a lance! My pocket is of far more account to me than Italy, or the Italians either. *I* serve whosoever pays me. Don't you know, my fine fellow, that we soldiers have no country but the one which provides us with bread?"

"My name is not fine fellow; my name is Ettore Fieramosca," retorted he, unable any longer to control himself, "and I know nothing of such cowardly practices as you mention; and if it were not . . ." here his hand glided involuntarily to the hilt of his sword, but he instantly withdrew it, and continued to speak with an expression of disgust on his face as though swallowing a bitter pill.

"It is wholly past endurance that these

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noble gentlemen and you, Messer Bayard, the foremost man in the world in our profession, as well as the most loyal and upright, should have to listen to an Italian's abuse of his native land. But who does not know that there are traitors in every country?"

"You are a traitor yourself!" shouted the Piedmontese in a voice of thunder.

Both clapped hands to their swords, but did not quite unsheathe them, for several bystanders interposed and restrained them, reminding them that envoys might neither offer nor receive insults. Loud were the shouts and tumult, but the voice of Bayard, overpowering the others, restored quiet and order, and Grajano was removed by main force.

Fieramosca, after pushing his sword back into the sheath, and striking the pommel with the palm of his hand to drive it home, turned to Bayard to apologise for what had occurred. The latter placed both hands on his shoulders and looked him full in the face, which made

the young man, half-blushing, lower his eyes. After awhile he kissed him on the forehead, and said to him, "*Benoiste soit la femme qui vous porta.*" *

An hour later, the portcullis of the gate of Barletta was let down to admit Ettore and Brancaleone on their return.

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* "Blessed be the woman who bore you."

CHAPTER VII.

INTRIGUE.

"One sole desire, one passion now remains,
To keep life's fever still within his veins,
Vengeance! dire vengeance on the wretch who cast
O'er him and all he loved that ruinous blast."

The Veiled Prophet.

THE morning of this day, which had been spent by the Italians in preparation for battle, had not been wasted by the guests who, the previous evening, had occupied rooms above the kitchen in the hostelry of the "Sun." Their names, which were a secret to everybody except the troop sergeant Boscherino, shall,

however, be no longer withheld from our readers. They were Cesar Borgia, Duca Valentino, and Don Michele da Corvella, one of his condottieri.

It would be but feeble imagery to compare such scoundrels to the most ferocious and bloodthirsty wild beasts: these act by instinct, and instinct has certain limits. But what limit is there to evil in perverse hearts swayed by minds of diabolical subtlety, supplemented by power, valour (for, unfortunately, all villains are not cowards), and immense riches?

Alexander VI.'s son, the terror of Italy and of all who, within its bounds, owned gold, seigniory, or attractive female relatives, was lodging almost alone in a poor house, in the midst of many who, at the cost of their own lives, would willingly have purchased the pleasure of wreaking their vengeance on him.

Those who have no idea of the self-reliance possible in a character uniting great strength of mind with a cool calculating judgment,

might set this confidence down as temerity. But the Duke knew what he was about; and weighing the danger with the gain which he anticipated in coming to Barletta, he considered the probabilities to be in his favour.

He had two motives for this journey. One was to discover Ginevra. From several indications he felt certain she was with Fieramosca; and if it is not to be supposed that a man of his stamp placed a higher value on her than on any other woman, yet it may at least be asserted that he was enraged with her for having defied him. The other was a State reason; and to give our readers a clear idea of it, it is necessary briefly to recall their attention to the tortuous and underhand policy of that period.

The power of the House of Borgia, created by the elevation of Cardinal Rodrigo Lenzuoli to the pontifical throne, had so increased, by means of temporal and spiritual weapons, frauds, family alliances and the support of

France, that every Italian prince and republic regarded it with distrust. Cesar, in the first instance Cardinal, ill-satisfied with the purple, resolved that he alone would monopolise his father's inheritance and reap the harvest of their common crimes. The Duke of Candia his brother, Gonfalonier of the Holy See, for whom the Pope designed a high position in Italy, was, he conceived, the only stumbling-block to his ambition. A dagger, hired by the Cardinal, or, according to some, wielded by his own hand, removed this obstacle. A poor man, who was watching some coal-barges at Ripetta, saw three men appear on the river-bank. One was on horseback; it was the Cardinal. Behind him was stretched his brother's corpse, the head and feet held up by the two others. They threw it into the Tiber, washed the horse's flanks which were bespattered with blood, and disappeared up a dark lane.

One month afterwards, Valentino, having

divested himself of the purple, appeared on horseback at the head of an army. Employing by turns force and treachery, he soon occupied Faenza, Cesena, Forti, Romagna, part of Marca, Camerino, and Urbino. But his unwarrantable usurpations, and the artifices he used to maintain his ill-gotten authority, besides his repeated outrages, of which so many were the victims, kindled against him universal odium, which only waited for an opportunity to blaze forth into a flame. Such might arise in two ways: either by the death of his father, or a cessation of French co-operation. The Pope's age, and the ever-fluctuating fortunes of the French arms in Italy, warned him to provide himself with other mainstays, in the event of these failing him.

His discriminating eye, which ferretted out every plot, which penetrated into the most secret recesses of every mind, did not fail to discern the prevailing condition of Italy, and he was aware that the impetuous valour of

the French was better adapted for winning a battle than sustaining the toils and privations of prolonged warfare.

He calculated that Consalvo would be a potential agent in curtailing their power. He foresaw that his valour, prudence and indomitable perseverance would go far towards impairing the fortunes of the Lilies; therefore, he thought it advisable to establish some communications with him, so as to have a door open if his old friends failed him. Such a nicely-laid plot (one which would certainly have been frustrated had the French got wind of it), he could not venture to entrust to the good faith of a third person. On these accounts he had, by stealth, left Sinigaglia and repaired to Barletta.

It wanted an hour to sunrise when Valentino, who was endowed with one of those iron constitutions to which repose is hardly necessary, rose, called Don Michele who was on the alert, and, consigning to him a letter, said:

"This to Consalvo. He will give you a safe conduct. If he asks for me, I am not in Barletta, but near at hand. Last night I heard all about Ginevra from those soldiers who were boozing below. I am certain now that Fieramosca has got her with him, or not far off; and, I suspect, in the place to which he goes by sea. Before vespers, I wish to know where she is to be found. Find Fieramosca, and take care they do not escape me."

Don Michele received the letter and his lord's orders in silence. He returned to his room, dressed, and, as soon as it was daylight, drew his hood over his head and walked towards the fortress.

As he was leaving the house, the Duke went to the window, and followed him with a malignant glance and scowl which, to anyone else, would have boded mischief. But of all the ruffians he retained in his service (and there were some signal ones amongst them), none other was so completely the life and soul of

every enterprise; and if one of his character might be credited with good faith, he certainly had given his master proofs of it on several momentous occasions. But for this very reason, that he was under great obligations to him, and could not kill him without cutting off his right hand, Cesar Borgia hated him. Little was known of his origin. Most people said he was Navarrese; and in connection with the circumstances which led him into the Duke's service, a strange story was related of revenge wreaked upon his own brother, in the way we proceed to relate.

Don Michele had a beautiful young wife, and his younger unmarried brother lived in his house. His sister-in-law's beauty had such an effect on the young man's susceptible heart that, casting all scruples to the winds, he sought, and not in vain, a return on her part of his passion.

However, they succeeded so ill in concealing their intrigue, that a maid-servant remarked it, and betrayed them to the husband. He,

lying in wait, surprised them, and drew his dagger with the view of stabbing both together; but they managed to escape from his hands, neither of them with any further injury than a slight wound. So enraged was he at the wrong done him, that he set off in trace of his brother who had fled with his sister-in-law to a place of safety, and determined to kill him at any price. But the latter, having heard of the vengeance vowed against him, kept so well on his guard, that for many years the injured husband was foiled in his designs, and seemed likely to carry his baffled fury with him to the grave.

Meanwhile, a Jubilee was proclaimed in the year MCCCCLXXXV.; and in the territory where Don Michele resided, processions were conducted, sermons preached, and professions of repentance made in the public squares, whereby many feuds were extinguished and reconciliations effected; nay, he, likewise, seemed resolved to put away all feeling of rancour, in

order to devote himself to religion. But, in spite of all his protestations, his brother never could be persuaded to meet him. At the end of the Holy Year, spent by Don Michele in continual penances, he determined to turn his back altogether on the world, and proceeding to a convent of Scalzi, he entered upon his noviciate; after completing which, he pronounced the solemn vows. Sent by his superiors into different parts of Spain, and even to Rome, for the purpose of studying theology, he became a great doctor, and returning to his native land with a reputation for sanctity, it seemed good to the monks to confer on him the priesthood. He celebrated Mass with all the customary pomp and concourse of friends and connections. After its conclusion he retired to the sacristy, still habited in his sacerdotal vestments, and took up his position on the *predella*, where his friends and relations came one after another to kiss his hand and embrace him.

He had been repeatedly heard to deplore the hatred which he had nourished for so many years against his brother, and to say that he had no other desire in the world than to sink the past in utter oblivion, and even, as became a a servant of God, to be the first to humble himself.

On this solemn occasion, moved by the united prayers of their relatives, his brother at last made up his mind to accompany them, and, approaching in his turn, began to address the priest in a deprecatory tone, while he threw his arms round his neck to embrace him; but then, instead of raising his head, his knees were observed to totter; he fell backwards on the ground, giving a deep sigh; and the other, brandishing in the air a sharp poniard which he had driven into his heart, kissed the dripping blade, kicked the corpse, exclaiming, "I have paid you out!" and straightway disappeared. Such was the consternation of the bystanders that no one interfered to prevent his escape.

In consequence of this misdeed, a price was set upon his head; he fled from country to country, till he finally took refuge at Rome, where under Valentino's protection his life was safe. It was not long before the Duke (being struck by his superior qualifications) employed him in affairs of the highest importance, and the renegade priest soon became prime agent in all his nefarious schemes.

On presenting himself at the Castle gate, and being interrogated by the guard as to his business, he displayed a coffer which he carried under his arm, and stated that he had just arrived from the Levant, and wanted to gain admittance to Consalvo to offer him several rarities; secret charms against witchcraft, and such-like humbug. One of the guards, after eyeing him from head to foot, beckoned to him to follow.

They entered a large courtyard enclosed by high buildings of ancient architecture. On each story the rooms had an exit on to galle-

ries open towards the interior, and supported by pillars of grey stone, on which rested arches, some round, others pointed according to the different epochs of their construction. Several round towers, crowned with swallow-tail battlements of the reddish tinge of old bricks, rose at unequal distances and overtopped the roofs. On the summit of the largest one, called the clock-tower, fluttered a big yellow and vermillion standard, the flag of Spain.

They reached the first story by an outside staircase with a wide parapet on which were ranged roughly-sculptured stone lions; they then entered a hall, where Don Michele was left by his guide who said to him:

"When the Great Captain passes out, you can speak to him."

"And pray, when will he go out?"

"Whenever he feels inclined," rudely answered the soldier, as he went off to return to his duty.

Don Michele was well aware that Patience

is the presiding deity of the anti-chamber, so held his peace; and noticing that he was an object of close scrutiny to a group of gentlemen assembled at the far end near the large windows opening on to the sea, he strove to assume an effective attitude as he sauntered about and looked at the old pictures which were hanging on the walls. He thus contrived to approach them in a natural manner; who knows, thought he, that something may not turn up here! At length he dexterously seized an opportunity of edging in a few words, and thus in a few minutes he had become a recognised member of the party.

Fortune, almost always invoked by honest men in vain, served him beyond his expectations. Inspecting with a keen glance the gentlemen present, he remarked one in particular, about fifty years of age, tall and thin, with one shoulder higher than the other; he was girt with a broadsword which stuck out behind his gaberdine, hitting the shins of everyone

near him, as he went about bowing and scraping and affecting to be on intimate terms with everyone, principally with those of most consideration. His eye-brows which were arched half-way up his forehead, and two round grey eyes, imparted to his lean visage an expression of mingled curiosity and simplicity; this latter quality being, moreover, stamped on his countenance by an everlasting smile of complacency with which he accompanied all his remarks. This worthy was Don Litterio Defastidiis, Mayor of Barletta, the vainest, most tiresome and inquisitive man in existence.

Don Michele, who was a good physiognomist, saw at once that he had found his man. He went up to him and began to converse, with the frank and courteous manners he knew so well how to assume at will. The Mayor never finished a phrase without some forced witticism, such as may be familiar to our reader if he has sat for half an hour on the apothecary's bench in any little Italian village; furthermore,

he liked his jokes to be applauded. Don Michele kept on bursting with laughter, and exclaiming, "You are the funniest man I ever met! Oh, how good! how very droll!" and so in less than half an hour they became the greatest friends possible.

Just then, Prospero Colonna, who was coming out from Consalvo with the safe conduct for the challenge, crossed the hall, and all present saluted him. Don Michele inquired who that baron might be, and Don Litterio was only too charmed to parade his knowledge, and told all about the challenge, and what had been said at the supper, of Fieramosca and his love-affairs. Don Michele had a better bargain than he could have hoped for, and said, with a show of interest:

"This young man—what 's his name?"

"Fieramosca."

"Is this Fieramosca a friend of your's, that you are so interested in him?"

"Oh! a great friend of mine; and Signor

Prospero too takes great interest in him, and so does everybody. . . . He is such a good fellow! we meet every evening either at Casa Colonna or in the piazza. It is such a pity there is one bad point about him! He never laughs; never by any chance! He always goes about with such a woe-begone face, it quite gives one the blues to look at him. Why, I saw it all long ago, and no one would believe me. Those brave soldiers are a queer lot, they seem to be ashamed of being in love. Anyhow, last night the French prisoner, who knew him in Rome, let the cat out of the bag; so now there is no doubt about it. Well says the proverb, '*Amore, tosse e scabbia, non la mostra se non l'abbia.*' *

The Mayor's pleasantry was, as usual, received by Don Michele with a burst of laughter which he was called upon to repeat two or three

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* "The symptoms of love, of a cough, and the scab, can only be shown by those who suffer from them."

times over, because it pleased Don Litterio to repeat his proverb so often. Then becoming serious again, the former continued: "If I could but see him, I could easily cure him of this infatuation, so that he would forget all about it. But . . ." Here he made a pause to induce the Mayor to question him.

"Cure him? how would you cure him?" said the Mayor; "that sort of fever needs something beside drugs and doctors."

"Well, all I can say is that I would stake my head on it, if I could but find a friend of his to help me."

Don Litterio stared at him, wondering whether he were in joke or earnest; needless to say, he bore the scrutiny so well that the result of it was favourable to him; whereupon the other, half convinced, said: "If that 's all you want, it can be soon forthcoming."

Boasting as he did of his penetration in discovering the evil, he flattered himself that great credit would accrue to him for effecting

a cure. And, undoubtedly, anybody who could perform the miracle of turning Fieramosca into a boon companion addicted to mirth and revelry, would be lauded to the skies by his friends and acquaintance. So he beat about the bush, and tried to extract from Don Michele by what means he proposed achieving such a feat; but the latter, as though mistrusting his discretion, stood on his guard and required a good deal of pressing before he would become more explicit. However, at last feigning to give way, he told him that he had learnt in the land of the Turks a secret of unfailing efficacy in quenching love, however fierce; and, without much difficulty, he obtained complete mastery over the poor Mayor's whimsical brain, and led him on to consider himself truly fortunate in this meeting.

"It all depends," wound up Don Michele, "on whether I can have an interview for five minutes with his lady-love; leave the rest to me."

"I really cannot promise that offhand, because, to tell the truth, I don't know who she is. But if she is in Barletta, or within ten miles round, I shall be happy to be of service to you. I shall be able to give you some information before twenty-four hours are over. I will go and look for Giuliano; he is a servant of the Commune, and the Devil himself for finding out everything."

"And where shall we meet?" asked Don Michele.

"Wherever you like."

"What do you think of the 'Sun' hostelry, about a couple of hours before sunset?"

"We 'll settle it so," answered Don Litterio. And leaving Don Michele astounded at his good luck, he went to the Town Hall to beat up Giuliano.

If our reader does not object, we will decline to accompany him, for fear Don Michele should become too much bored waiting for us in the anti-chamber.

For some time he waited in vain for Consalvo's appearance. At length he prevailed on the usher to introduce him.

The Spanish Captain was standing by the window, enveloped in a long scarlet robe lined with fur. The august presence, lofty brow, scrutinising glance, and, in fine, the fame of this distinguished individual, inspired Valentino's condottiere with that sense of awe, and I should almost say of abasement, with which the wicked are always impressed wher confronted with a man of eminent virtue. He made a humble and profound obeisance, and said:

"Illustrious Lord, the importance of the message I bring your Magnificence, obliges me to present myself to you under a false name; if by so doing I give offence, I most humbly crave your forgiveness, but, as you can see for yourself, secresy was imperative, and my patron had nothing to rely upon but your eminent good faith."

Consalvo, in reply, briefly intimated that no

one would ever find any confidence reposed in him misplaced, and that he might explain his errand.

Don Michele presented the Duke's letter, received the safe conduct, returned with it to his master, and gave him an assurance that the secret of his presence in Barletta would be respected by Consalvo.

He went on to mention his expectations from the researches of his new friend the Mayor; whereupon, Valentino, satisfied at the promising aspect of affairs, drew his hood over his eyes, wrapped himself up in his mantle, and left the inn. He proceeded in a boat to a spot behind the rock whither Consalvo, as arranged with Don Michele, had sent a man to wait for him. He was admitted through a wicket gate, and conducted up a private staircase and past a succession of secret nooks to the chamber of the Spanish Captain.

We do not think it necessary to enter into the details of the conference.

In substance Valentino, with admirable lucidity, set forth the condition of affairs in Italy, also the resources, hopes and fears of the various States. He gave it to be understood that he was anxious for an alliance with Spain, and pretended that he was actuated by a desire of contributing to the welfare of his people, and of averting the misfortunes which would befall them if the Spaniards were to come off victors. By a candour which he well knew how to feign, he succeeded in producing a better impression of himself than his reputation warranted. He offered to form a league with Spain to include the Pope, and also the Venetians if they liked to join, by which they would be pledged to combine in promoting their mutual interests, and only to announce their treaty to the world when the Spaniards had become masters of two-thirds of the kingdom of Naples. He proposed to attack Tuscany with his own forces, and pointed out that, as the Florentines were the principal friends of the French in Italy, it

was most essential to cripple such a powerful ally. He added that it would be very advantageous to the league to encourage the Pisans to act in unison, by aiding them to retrieve the losses they had suffered at the hands of the Republic of Florence, of which they might be trusted to be vigilant guardians, provided they had their hands sufficiently strengthened.

Consalvo had no serious objections to make to these proposals, and Cesar Borgia's crafty intellect enabled him to make his representations sound all the more plausible as they really contained a certain element of truth. But the Spaniard knew with whom he had to deal, and was not easily induced to trust him.

He took the line of not giving a precise answer at once, but said that before taking any resolution, he should wish to confer with his intimate advisers. He was not wanting toward Valentino either in good words or courteous offices; he conducted him to certain

apartments on the ground floor, overlooking the sea, placed them at his disposal for the time he chose to spend at Barletta, and had him waited on by some of his confidential servants, with the honours due to a Pope's son.

Towards evening Fieramosca and Brancaleone reached the city gate. Hardly were they inside, when they became the cynosure of a crowd of officials, men-at-arms, and soldiers, who flocked round them in increasing numbers at every step; all eager to be the first to learn the answer of the French. "How did it go off?" "What answer did they make?" "Who will fight?" "When?" "Where?" . . . But the friends said, laughing at this excitement, "Come to the Castle, and you will hear." They reached the Castle, and, on being introduced to Consalvo, Fieramosca consigned to him the Duc de Nemours' letter which he read aloud, and which accepted the challenge, but refused a free field. This refusal seemed

to all very strange, and the great Captain said :

"I should not have expected the French to have used such a subterfuge in order to avoid the battle. But you shall have a free field ; I give you my word for it."

Then calling one of his scribes, he said to him :

"Write and tell the Duc de Nemours that, with his good will, the obstacle is removed ; that I offer him a truce till after the combat ; in short, that I am expecting my daughter, Donna Elvira, in two days' time ; that I intend to get up a little fête for her ; and that if he is disposed to suspend hostilities and join in our amusements, it will be all the more lively for her."

Hardly two hours elapsed between the writing and despatch of the letter, and the receipt of the answer. The Duc de Nemours accepted the invitation as well as the truce, which was published the same evening through

the city, to the sound of the trumpet, together with the names of the Italian combatants. To the original numbers were now added the following three to complete the tale desired by the French : Ludivico Amirale da Terni, Mariano da Sarni, and Giovanni Capoccio Romano.

CHAPTER VIII.

GINEVRA.

"And must we be divided? must we part?"

Richard the Second.

"Play thou the heroine's part for one half hour
And ever after take thy woman's way."

Philip von Artevelde.

The Convent on the island situated between Monte Gargano and Barletta was dedicated to Sant' Orsola. Its walls now present to view a heap of ruins choked with thorns and clad with ivy; but at the date of our story they were in good condition, and formed an edifice of severe aspect, erected by the tardy remorse

of a princess of the House of Anjou, who retired here to finish, in the odour of sanctity, a life spent in the unbridled excesses of pleasure and ambition. No more peaceful nor delightful solitude could be desired.

On a shelf, perhaps twenty fathoms above the level of the sea, was a fertile strip of ground extending about fine hundred paces. In the angle nearest terra firma stands the Church. The entrance is through a handsome portico, supported by fine columns of grey granite. The interior, divided into three naves with pointed arches resting on clusters of slender sculptured pillars, receives the light through long Gothic windows glazed with coloured panes, representing legends of the miracles attributed to the Saint. The tribune behind the high altar is round, and ornamented with mosaics on a gold ground. Here are depicted God the Father in glory, and at His feet Saint Ursula with the eleven thousand virgins upborne by angels.

The Church, situated at some little distance from the frequented parts, was almost always empty. The nuns alone assembled for psalmody at fixed hours of the day and night.

It was towards evening; and while vespers were being sung behind the high altar in a drawling and monotonous chant, a woman was kneeling in prayer beside a tomb of white marble, grown yellow with age, which rested beneath a canopy, likewise of marble, carved with flowers and animals in the Gothic style: within reposed the bones of the foundress of the Convent.

This woman, shrouded from head to foot in a veil of the same hue as the surrounding marbles, pale, motionless, and absorbed in her devotions, might have been mistaken for a statue placed there by the artificer in a praying attitude, had it not been for two long chesnut locks which peeped out from beneath the veil, while her occasionally raised eye-lids

displayed to view two blue eyes aglow with all the fervour of ardent supplication.

Poor Ginevra (for she it was) had good cause to pray; so sore was her extremity, that her weak woman's heart was unequal to the task of mastering its emotions. She repented, but too late, of the course she had adopted in following Fieramosca, and uniting her fortunes with those of that man whom, above all, duty and prudence alike admonished her to shun. She felt remorse for having so long put off taking measures to ascertain whether her husband were dead or alive. Reason suggested, "There is yet time to do what has been left undone"; but the voice of her heart replied, "Too late," and this "too late" sounded like the knell of an irrevocable sentence. Her days dragged on their weary length, leaving her anxious, troubled, and destitute of any hope of release, save by submission to one or other of the contending powers which were striving for the mastery within her. Her

health was giving way under the stress of this perpetual struggle.

The morning and noon-day hours were the least irksome to her. She had her embroidery and books, and also the Convent garden to walk about. But when evening came! The most gloomy thoughts, the most carking cares (like those insects which seem to multiply and become most pertinacious towards sunset), appeared to wait for that hour, to assail her all at once.

Ginevra then took refuge in Church. Even there, neither joy nor peace were to be found, but, at any rate, some passing consolation.

Her prayer was short and never varied:

"Holy Virgin! make me wish to give up loving him!" and sometimes she added, "Make me resolve to seek Grajano, and wish to find him." But often her heart failed her in uttering this second prayer.

From continually repeating these words, she often caught herself thinking of Fieramosca at

the very moment when with her tongue she was praying to forget him. Then she sighed and wept, all the while only too conscious of the infirmity of her purpose.

However, that day (as the tendency of our nature is to ups and downs in its moods), she fancied she was capable of choosing the better part. The prospect of an illness, which her failing health warned her was near at hand; the idea of death, amidst the terrors of a guilty conscience, coming home to her in a moment of wavering, turned the scale, and made her resolve to inquire after Grajano; and, if she should discover him, to return to him at all costs, and by any means she could command. If Fieramosca had been present, she would have informed him of her decision without a moment's hesitation. "But," said she, rising to leave the Church, "he will come this evening, and shall then know all."

The nuns, having finished the choral service, filed out in silence through a small door which

opened on to the cloister court, and returned to their cells. Ginevra followed them. She entered an arcade with tiles shining like a looking-glass, and enclosing a small garden. In the centre was a well, beneath a roof supported by four pilasters. Thence, passing through a long alley, she came to an inner court. At the far end stood a small house for the accommodation of strangers, unenclosed and separate from the rest of the building. Ginevra lived there with the girl rescued by Fieramosca, occupying two or three rooms, between which, as is customary in convents, the only communication was by one common outlet. Ginevra entered the room where they were in the habit of passing the greater part of the day, and found Zoraide occupied with a loom. As she worked, she was singing a lay in the Arabic language, full of minor tones, like all the songs of Southern races. She glanced at the embroidery and sighed (it was a blue satin mantle, stitched with silver, which

they were making between them for Fieramosca), then she went and sat down on a balcony shaded by vine tendrils, facing Barletta.

The sun was then hidden behind the hills of Puglia. A few streaky clouds were scattered about the sky, irradiated by its glow and resembling gold-fish swimming in a sea of fire. These were reflected, in long lines, on the waves furrowed here and there by some fishermen's boats which a light east wind was driving towards the shore. The lady's eyes were fixed on the mole opposite, from which, many a time, she had watched a boat unmoored and rowed towards the island.

To-day she longs for it even more than usual, having a sort of feeling that its coming will decide her fate; and be that what it may, anything she feels must needs be preferable to her present state of irresolution. But how long and bitter do those moments of expectation seem to her! She wishes Ettore were

already present. She wishes he had already heard the words she finds it so hard to utter. If he delays, or does not come, will her strength hold out till to-morrow ?

It was not long before a dark, imperceptibly-moving speck appeared on the sea close to the shore. A quarter of an hour later it was nearer, and looked larger. Although at that distance it was only just possible to make it out to be a boat containing a man steering, yet Ginevra recognised it and felt a tightening of her heart-strings.

By a sudden revulsion in all her ideas, it seemed to her, all at once, impossible to tell him what, a moment before, she had, or thought she had, irrevocably settled. It would have been a positive relief to her to have seen that little bark turn back; but no ! on it came—already was it within hail of the island, already was audible the dip of oars in the water.

" Zoraide, here he is ! " she said, turning to

her companion who, by way of answer, slightly raised her head, and instantly bent her eyes again over her work. Ginevra went down in the direction of the landing-place, reaching the sea by a staircase roughly hewn out of the rock, just as Fieramosca was laying his oars down in the bottom of the boat, while its prow grated against the rock.

But if the lady's heart quailed at the thought of declaring her resolution, not less did Fieramosca's courage fail him; he, on his side, having equally serious revelations to make to her. Far removed from the districts where Grajano had lately been engaged in warfare, they had heard no news of him for some time past. Four soldiers from Romagna, who were either misinformed or mistaken in the name, affirmed that he had been killed; and it was far too much to Fieramosca's interest to give credence to their tale for him to question its veracity or take much trouble in verifying it. It is seldom one cares to be

enlightened to one's own hurt, so he had neglected ascertaining the truth till that day when his own eyes had undeceived him. He returned to Barletta, still battling with himself, and still undecided as to whether or no he ought to tell Ginevra. To do so would part her from him for ever, but any other course seemed wrong; besides, how was it possible to hide anything from her, so quick as she was in reading his every thought?

Hesitating thus, he reached the island. Still irresolute, he came face to face with Ginevra, and so was obliged to decide at once Yes or No. He hastily made up his mind to the latter alternative, saying to himself, "I can think it over afterwards."

"I have come very late this evening," said he, going up the steps, "but we have had a good deal on hand to-day, and there 's no end of news."

"News!" echoed Ginevra; "good, or bad?"

"Good! and with God's help, in a few days there will be still better."

They reached the esplanade in front of the Church. The extreme point, where the shelf of rock falls away sheer into the sea, was fenced in by a low wall. A wooden cross was reared in the centre of a plot encircled by cypresses, and here and there several rude seats were dotted about.

On one of these they both sat down, bathed in the silvery rays of the moon, which were already overpowering the purple shades of twilight, and Fieramosca proceeded:

"Rejoice, darling Ginevra; this has been a glorious day for Italy and for us, and if God does not deny His favour to a just cause it is but the prelude to still greater glory. But now you must summon up your fortitude. You are called upon, to-day, to set an example to your countrywomen."

"Say on," answered his fair companion, looking hard at him, as if, by study of his

countenance, to anticipate the test to which she was about to be put; "I am a woman, but have plenty of spirit."

"I know that, Ginevra; sooner should I doubt the sun rising to-morrow than doubt you" . . . and he proceeded to give her an account of the challenge, entering into minute details of its origin, his expedition to the French camp, his return, and the impending combat. His glowing words, instinct with patriotism and thirst for glory, yet further fired by the influence of Ginevra's presence, may be left to the imagination of anyone of our readers who has felt his pulses quicken while discussing some generous measure of a patriotic nature with a woman capable of sympathy with his elevating theme.

As Ettore continued to expatiate (words, voice and gestures increasing in animation), Ginevra's respiration became more and more hurried; like sails inflated by the gusts of a driving wind, her bosom rose and fell, heaving with

impetuous emotions, discordant indeed, yet all worthy of her, while her eyes kindled and sparkled, as they seemed to draw inspiration from the young man's tones.

At length she seized the hilt of Fieramosca's sword in her white and delicate hand, and bravely raising her face, exclaimed:

"Oh, if I had but your arm! If I could but wield this weapon, which it is as much as I can do to hold! You should not go alone. No! And there would be no fear of my being told, 'The Italians have won; but among the killed' . . . oh! I know, I know, if vanquished you will never return . . ." And here, overcome by the thought of the not far-distant peril, she could not refrain from a burst of tears some of which fell on Fieramosca's hand.

"Why are you crying, Ginevra? Would anything in the world tempt you to regret this challenge?"

"Oh, no, Ettore, not for an instant! don't wrong me so." And drying her tears, she

continued eagerly, "I am not crying . . . there, it's all over . . . it was only just for one moment . . ." Then with a smile, which her wet eye-lashes made still more fascinating than usual, she added: "I wanted to make myself out too brave, talking of swords and battles, and I have only shown myself up; it is no more than I deserve."

"Women of your stamp can make swords perform miracles without touching them; you might turn the world topsy-turvy . . . if you only knew how. I cast no reflections on *you*, Ginevra, but on Italian women in general, who unfortunately, do not resemble you."

This last sentence was overheard by Zoraide who came up with a basket full of cakes, apples, and other delicacies. She held it swinging on her left arm, and in her right hand she carried a bottle of white wine. Her garments were cut in the fashion of the West, although the taste of the still barbarous countries from which she derived her origin betrayed itself

in the selection of brilliant colours, and her fantastic style of arranging them. Her head, according to Eastern custom, was wound round with fillets of ribbon, the ends of which fell over her shoulders. She had the arched eyebrows, the eagle eye, the brown and (if I might venture so to say) slightly golden complexion peculiar to the races near the Caucasus. Through her gracious manners there ever and anon gleamed flashes of a savage nature which found expression in a bold frankness, without the smallest respect of persons.

She stopped, and gazing at Ettore and Ginevra, said, in Italian words, but with a foreign accent:

"You were talking about women, Ettore; I should like to hear, too."

"About something very different from women," answered Ginevra; "he was talking of a dance in which we should cut rather a poor figure."

These enigmatical words still further aroused

Zoraide's curiosity; so Ettore repeated to her all that he had already told Ginevra.

The damsel stood pensive for a few moments, then said, shaking her head:

"I don't understand you. What occasion is there for so much anger and commotion because the French say they do not think much of you? Have they not proclaimed it already pretty clearly by the fact of coming into your country to devour your corn and drive you from your homes? Don't the Spaniards say as much by coming into Italy and acting as they do? The stag does not hunt the lion from its den, but the lion hunts the stag and devours it."

"Zoraide, here we are not amongst barbarians, where force alone decides everything. It would take too long to explain to you the claims of the French Crown to the Kingdom of Naples. I can only tell you, it is a fief of the Holy Church; that means, she is Mistress of it, and as such, about two hundred years

ago, invested with it Charles Duke of Provence, whose heir is the Most Christian King."

"Oh, indeed! and who gave it to the Church?"

"It was given by a French warrior, Robert Guiscard, who had become master of it by force of arms."

"Well, now I understand less than ever. The book Ginevra gave me, and which, you know, I have read attentively all through, was it not written by Issaben-Jusuf?"

"Yes."

"Does it not say that all men are made in the image of God, and ransomed with His blood? I can understand that there may be among Christians some who, abusing their strength, lord it over the lives and possessions of their equals; but how this abuse can be changed into a right, descending to a man's grandsons, I confess I do not understand."

"I do not know," replied Ettore, smiling, "whether you do not understand, or whether

you understand only too well. But surely, without this right, what would become of Popes, Emperors, Kings; and without them, how would the world get on?"

Zoraide shrugged her shoulders and answered nothing. With the contents of her basket she prepared a meal on one of the seats, which she first covered with a cloth redolent of the fragrance of clean linen.

"Oh, yes!" continued Ettore, anxious to divert the thoughts legible on Ginevra's face; "let us laugh as long as we can, and let the world go its own way. Meanwhile we will have a merry supper. The proverb says, 'Don't talk of dead people at table,' so let us avoid the subject of challenges, and choose some more cheerful topic. We shall soon be *en fête*. Signor Consalvo has proclaimed a joust, a bull-fight, comedies, balls, and dinners. It will be a regular jollification."

"How can that be? what about the French?" asked Ginevra.

"The French will come too. They have been offered a truce, and they will not be so churlish as to reject it. The occasion is the arrival of Donna Elvira, the great Captain's daughter; and he, loving her as the apple of his eye, intends to have great rejoicings."

Hereupon ensued such a series of questions from the two women, that Ettore had enough to do to satisfy first one and then the other with the following answers. The reader will have no difficulty in making a guess at the queries.

"Handsome? beautiful, they say; her hair is like spun gold. She will arrive in a few days. She stayed behind, ill, at Taranto, and now she is cured she is returning to her father. Is he very fond of her! just think of what he did for her that he never did for himself. You may have heard that once at Taranto the Spanish bands mutinied for arrears of pay, and Inigo tells me that nothing short of a miracle saved Consalvo's life, for all those Spanish

devils pressed round him with their pikes. While endeavouring to appease them, a certain Yciar, captain of infantry, spoke in disrespectful terms of his daughter. Not a word did he say. The tumult came to an end, and by evening all was quiet. Next morning, on rising and going into the square, what do you think was to be seen? Captain Yciar dangling by the neck out of his window. And of those who had pointed their lances at his own breast not a hair had been touched. So you may fancy how fond he is of her."

What with all this gossip it was getting late.

"Now I must be off," said Fieramosca. He rose, and, accompanied by the two women, walked slowly towards the boat. Ginevra went with him to the foot of the rock, and Ettore, while getting into his skiff, shouted a farewell to Zoraide; but she made hardly any response, and went away. He, not thinking much about it, said to Ginevra:

"She did not hear; you must wish her

good-bye for me. Now, adieu. Who knows if we shall see much of one another these next few days! Never mind; somehow or other we will manage it."

He dipped his oars into the water, and rowed away from the island. Ginevra, having gone up the steps, remained awhile on the top, deep in thought, watching the two divergent lines which extended from the boat's bows some distance over the surface of the sea. When she could no longer see anything, she retired to the strangers' quarters, closed the door for the night, and barred it with two bolts.

CHAPTER IX.

CAUGHT IN HIS OWN TOILS.

"Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,
And thrice again, to make up nine,
Peace!—the charm 's wound up."

Macbeth.

"Now does my project gather to a head,
My charms crack not—my spirits obey."

The Tempest.

SINCE the beginning of the world, much the same sort of lures have been used by fowlers for catching birds. In like manner, much the same snares have ever proved successful in entrapping men. But the most seductive of all is, perhaps, that which brings into play our

amour propre. Don Michele was quite alive to this. Having ascertained the Mayor's weak point, he succeeded, as we have seen, by a few skilful moves, in getting him well in hand. When Don Litterio left Consalvo's ante-chamber to look for the servant of the Commune, he walked along with his head full of fantastic conceits, a host of ideas seething in his brain, and unable to contain himself with joy at having found one who held out a promise of such wonderful performances. Now and then, it is true, a suspicion obtruded itself that Don Michele might possibly be a quack; but, as he had a high opinion of his own sagacity, like all those who spend their lives in being taken in, he kept on saying to himself: "I am not to be imposed upon."

He kept his appointment at the "Sun" inn, but he had nothing, as yet, to tell Don Michele; for the servant, whom he considered such a wonderful detective, had promised much, done little, and discovered nothing.

That evening at supper, his wife and maid-servant did not fail to perceive that he was brimming over with some profound mystery; and not one mouthful did they let him eat in peace for questions. It was a great feat on his part not letting it all out; for it was a more difficult matter for him to keep a secret (especially if he fancied it might increase his importance) than for anyone else with a tickling in the throat to restrain a fit of coughing. Still, he could not resist giving hints. "Ah! I know! . . . if you did but know! . . . if a certain affair succeeds!" . . . then on reflection, he saw he was on dangerous ground, rose from table, and, irritably snatching up a candle, went off to bed.

That night seemed an age to him. At last day came. He dressed in haste, and, going down into the piazza, took up his position at a barber's where Don Michele had promised to meet him. He sat down on a bench in the shop which was the morning resort of the

notary, doctor, apothecary and two or three other notabilities of Barletta. Crossing his legs, he swung the suspended foot backwards and forwards, resting, meanwhile, his left arm against his body, and nursing his right elbow on the opposite side in the palm of his hand. Beating a tattoo on his chin with his fingers, he kept on the look-out for his friend, while he affected to gaze vacantly into the air. The apothecary, notary and others had, in turn, said to him, "Good morning, my Lord Mayor," but seeing it was all no good, and that they hardly got an answer out of him, they drew back respectfully, and remarked to one another in an undertone, "What in the world is up this morning?" Don Litterio let them talk on, and kept silence; for he had two faces at command: one, humbly facetious, for those above him in station; the other, surly and full of angles, for those beneath him; such being, as is well known, an invaluable talent granted by Heaven to all simpletons.

Half an hour had thus elapsed when he heard a voice at his shoulder, saying:

"Your Excellency! my Lord Mayor . . . no offence . . . if you will accept them . . . they have been gathered with the dew on them."

He turned round and saw the gardener of Sant' Orsola, Gennaro Rafamillo, who was offering him a tithe out of a basket of cherries which he came, every morning, into the piazza to sell with other fruit, and who knew, by experience, that in virtue of this tribute he was free afterwards to sell as he pleased without troubling himself about the market ensign.

"I have something else to think of beside your cherries," answered Don Litterio; nevertheless, he peered into the basket and puffed out his cheeks, from which he gradually emitted the confined air, while, with a show of lofty contempt, he took three or four vine leaves, arranged them on the bench to act as

a plate, and piled upon them a fine heap of cherries which he began to eat.

"Now, tell me, ar'n't they good? Yesterday evening I took some to Madonna, and she said she had never seen such fine ones."

"And pray, who may Madonna be?"

"Madonna Ginevra, who lives in the strangers' quarters; they say she is a great gentlewoman from Naples; and she has either a husband or brother here in the service of Signor Prospero; he comes nearly every day to visit her . . . ." The gardener would have gone on talking for some time, laconicism not being his forte, but Don Michele, meantime, had come up, and was standing behind the Mayor without his being aware of it.

"Here we are, my Lord Mayor!" said he, striking him on the shoulder; "I suspect this good man can set us on the right track, leave him to me."

Without delay he set to work to cross-examine Gennaro, and soon ascertained, from

his answers, that this was the identical Ginevra of whom he was in search. The clue once found, the rest was nothing to one of his resources. He foresaw that the Mayor would be of the greatest use in procuring him admittance into the Convent, for the purpose of examining the place, so as to lay his plans for seizing the lady. It was necessary to inspire him with confidence in order to drive out of this functionary's head all suspicion as to the rectitude of his aims. So, drawing him aside, he said:

"We must talk it over a little. Wait for me at the 'Sun inn,' while I go and see whether this fellow can point out to me the young man who now and then visits Ginevra."

Don Litterio went off to the inn; and Don Michele, taking the gardener with him to the place where they were changing guard, and which was crowded with officers and soldiers, asked him:

"Is he amongst those?"

Gennaro looked about for a little, saw Fieramosca, and said, "There he is"; and Don Michele, finally, ascertained from one of the soldiers that he had found the right man.

Five minutes afterwards, he was with the Mayor in the inn which at that hour was deserted. Having taken seats opposite one-another, with two glasses and a bottle of Greek wine on the table between them, Don Michele began to speak with an affectation of modesty.

"Well! we have found that much out; but before going any further, I have a few words to say to you, Don Litterio. I have travelled about the world, and profess to know an honest man at first sight. From the little talk we have had together, I gather there are very few in the world your superiors in ready wit."

The Mayor acknowledged the compliment by a look of gratification.

"No, no, really! I mean what I say, you do not know me. If I thought the contrary, I should not hesitate to say roundly to you,

'Lord Mayor, excuse me; but you are not troubled with overmuch brains.' Then if I were an impostor, I should look out for someone else. But, as I can boast of being as honest as any man, come who may, I am not afraid of dealing with anyone who is wide awake. Now I mean to tell you everything, and you will have something more than empty words to put faith in. You shall see deeds, and they shall convince you that you have to do with an upright man."

On this, he began a trumped-up story: how he had been a great sinner and had made a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre to obtain pardon; how a hermit of Lebanon had finally absolved him, and ordered him, for a penance, to wander about the world for seven years; wherever he found good works to be done, he was to take them in hand, at the risk even of his life, and be contented to live, himself, in humility and poverty; how, by so doing, he had employed for the benefit of

mankind, all the powers and knowledge he had acquired in his long journeyings through Persia, Syria, and Egypt.

"Now you understand," he continued, "why I am so anxious to set your friend free from the trammels of his passion which might imperil the eternal salvation of his soul. The woman is, beyond doubt, that Madonna Ginevra, of Santa Orsola. My meeting her depends entirely upon you. Perhaps you think that I am a rogue; and you may have a thousand reasons for misgivings about introducing a total stranger into that sanctuary."

Don Litterio shrugged his shoulders.

"No! I repeat: you may have very good reasons against it. No one has his character written on his forehead; and, unfortunately, there are so many bad ones about. But suppose I were to show you that, by the help of God, the virtue pertains to my eye of power to extract treasures from the bowels of the earth,

to check the momentum of a bullet, and to execute many other difficult things, all of which you may see me perform, at the same time relinquishing all the profits to you; content, myself, with the pittance which suffices to sustain bare existence. Then, surely, you will say, 'He might become rich and live in comfort; instead of which, he is poor, and leads a life of hardship; so what he says must be true, and he cannot deserve to be considered a rogue.' Two more words, and I have done. Many have been benefited by meeting me; it might turn out to your advantage also. Think it over, and make up your mind quickly. The penance I have to perform obliges me to roam about the world without stopping more than a week in any one place."

This harangue had such an effect on the Mayor who listened breathless and open-mouthed, that he felt quite ashamed of having entertained any doubts. However, to keep up his credit for prudence, he answered that

seeing would be believing, and that he would willingly, afterwards, lend his assistance.

With this agreement they parted, on the understanding that Don Michele would put in an appearance again as soon as possible, and meanwhile apply himself (by virtue of his special powers) to find out whether any treasure lay buried in the neighbourhood.

Having thus prepared the ground as far as the Mayor was concerned, and seeing that his plot promised so well, his next care was to bait the trap. He sought Boscherino, and told him that the Duke had need of his services. Trembling like a reed at the mere name of Valentino, without the smallest notion what was required of him, he answered, "I am ready." Don Michele, without further explanations, said to him, "Wait outside the gate which opens on to the sea-shore and leads to the bridge of Sant' Orsola."

The truce between the two armies, which had been accepted by the French Captain, per-

mitted the besieged to rove about the country outside. Boscherino kept his appointment as punctually as his guide, who joined him carrying a parcel under his arm. Anyone who chose to follow them might have seen them walk along the beach for more than a mile beyond the bridge which connects the island with terra firma; there strike off to the left, plunge through the thick scrub of a deserted valley, and enter an ancient, forsaken chapel which for many years had served as a burying place. But so as not to repeat this journey, we will defer making it till nightfall, and hope our readers will feel obliged to us for our present reserve.

We will only say that about two hours before sunset Don Michele made his appearance alone in the piazza, accosted the Mayor who was in the barber's shop, and whispered in his ear:

"I have found the place. I will be at your door to-night on the stroke of three. Don't keep me waiting."

In fact, at 3 o'clock * Don Michele was at his post. The Mayor issued forth, quickly and noiselessly closed the door, and silently passing through dark streets and lanes (for there were no lamps then), they were soon clear of the town.

On and on they walked. They heard the castle clock strike four, but with a hollow sound, as the wind bore it faintly to their ears, for they were already some distance past Sant' Orsola, and were advancing, through a wild region, towards the ruined chapel. It was a lonely, sterile tract dotted with stunted bushes which produced the weirdest effects. The path they were following was soon lost in loose sand, into which they sank knee-deep. Every now and then, they came across dry beds of torrents, full of gravel and stones, washed down by the waters; but the two wayfarers,

* Three hours after sunset.

as they overcame these obstacles, were in a totally different frame of mind.

Don Michele, more accustomed to walk by night than by day, led the way with a firm step. The other, who, in all his life, had, perhaps, not been twice outside the town after the Ave Maria, soon got out of breath, and kept looking round, in his heart cursing the hour when he left home; and truly, it was an ill-starred expedition for him! His imagination was assailed by a host of terrors, not the least of which was that of finding himself alone, far away from any habitation, by night, and with a man of whom, after all, he knew nothing.

However, from time to time he made an effort to screw up his courage, and hummed three or four notes (the fifth died away for want of breath); then he fancied he heard a noise among the bushes where, by the uncertain light of the moon which was clouded over, he thought, when at a distance, he saw

a man lurking; but on coming near, it turned out to be a stump or a stone. Then some spectral form or vision of the dead seemed to flit past, and he muttered a requiem or De Profundis. A prey to the most dismal forebodings, he emerged with his companion on to a clearing in the wood, in the middle of which stood the chapel.

On the door were painted skeletons, standing upright, with mitres and triple crowns on their heads; while in their hands they held scrolls on which were inscribed short Latin verses, such as "Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur," "Miseremine mei," &c.; and though reading was no easy matter by moonlight, still the conspicuous faces of the dead produced a sufficiently striking effect. Don Michele uncovered a lantern, and was about to pass through the doorway. The Mayor had stopped short a few paces behind, and on becoming aware of his companion's intention he exclaimed 'Here!' in such a terrified and lamentable tone,

that it brought a smile on Don Michele's thin livid lips.

"You must show a little more spirit here my Lord Mayor, for in such places as these fear would not stand you in much stead if we were to meet with any mishap. You have me with you, and I work by God's agency; and to show you that it is only in His name I constrain the dead, let us begin by prayer."

He knelt down, began to tell his beads, and recite Misereres and Dies Illa, to which Don Litterio made the best responses he could; registering a vow that if he escaped with his life he would light a candle every Saturday, and fast on All Souls' Eve. The prayer finished, they moved on. A half-rotten door, which could hardly stand on its rusty hinges, gave way, and a kick from Don Michele almost brought it to the ground. They entered, tearing their hose in the brambles which choked up the entrance.

The pavement was strewn with bones of the

dead. In one corner a worm-eaten bier crumbling into dust, and some shovels which at some remote period had been used for digging graves, were the only contents of the place. Some hundreds of bats, startled at the entrance of the two men with the lantern, took to flight in disorder, beating their wings against the walls, and, with their peculiar stridulous cries, seeking refuge on a Gothic steeple which had its base near the high altar.

The locality, the loneliness, the lateness of the hour, were enough, if not to excite alarm, at any rate to predispose the mind to yield to superstitious influences; and poor Don Litterio who, when the sun was still high above the horizon, had looked forward to this moment without discomposure, now learnt by experience the difference between saying and doing. He stood gazing at those bones beneath his feet, those walls green with damp, and in many places covered with ancient pictures: thus, bolt upright in the midst, he stood with

clasped hands awaiting the conclusion of this devilry. Don Michele set down the small parcel he was carrying, pulled out his exorcising book, put on a black stole printed with cabalistic signs, and, after going through a series of ceremonies, began to describe a circle with his divining rod: he marked out an opening, and desired the Mayor to enter with his left foot foremost, at the same time handing him the talisman and muttering Greek, Latin, and Hebrew words, invoking legions of devils in the name of the Eternal God, now raising, now lowering his voice which, during his frequent pauses, reverberated through the vaulted roof. A stray bat flew close to the Mayor, and fanned his face: he, crouching and trembling, seemed almost petrified with fear. He dreaded every moment to see issue from the tombs the originals of the skeletons depicted on the walls; and most fervently he besought God, in His mercy, to render abortive the incantations of his terrible companion.

While on his knees imploring divine interposition, he felt a blow on his shoulder. As he raised his eyes, he saw the corner behind the belfry filled with a lurid light, and a human form, enveloped in a long winding-sheet, emerge very slowly from a grave. The spectre remained motionless; needless to say, the Mayor did the same. Don Michele bent down, and whispered in his ear:

"Come, courage! now is the time to show your mettle; be quick and ask for what you like."

All in vain; the Mayor could neither move, speak nor breathe; so Don Michele, himself, spoke some words in an unknown tongue to the apparition. For sole response, it slowly raised an arm, and pointed to a tomb the stone of which had already been removed.

"Do you understand? He says, by digging there, we shall find florins enough to satisfy us."

But the other did not seem to hear. Find-

ing it was hopeless getting him to stir, Don Michele went himself to the sepulchre and easily let himself down into it. After a short interval, he reappeared with an iron pot smeared with earth, and going up to the Mayor who had stood transfixed without so much as moving a finger, he poured out before him a considerable quantity of gold coins, or at least what appeared such, as they fell on the ground ; the sight of them was, however, ineffectual in restoring animation to the poor wretch who had got himself into such trouble to procure them. The last coin had hardly fallen on the heap, when the door was violently burst open, and it was but the work of a moment for fifteen or twenty ugly-looking ruffians to rush into the church, and pounce upon the pair, to whose hearts and throats they pointed their weapons.

Don Michele had barely time to clap hand to the hilt of his sword, before four or five slashes in his cloak and a prick or two admon-

ished him that he had better remain quiet and unresisting if he wished to escape with his life.

The Mayor was already in such extremity of terror that this fresh accident did not produce any sensible effect on him. He stood stock-still as before, his eyes distorted, his head sunk between his shoulders, and his clasped hands unwittingly compressing his lean and shrivelled fingers with such violence that his nails cut into the flesh, while he whined out, "Don't kill me, I am in a state of mortal sin!" *

The lantern had been upset in the commotion, and now, in an inverted position, cast a glare over the strange company which, keeping still for a moment to make sure that the two captives neither would nor could make any resistance, appeared to be composed of that

* This plea for reprieve from death has to this day much weight with the so-called brigands of the Roman Campagna. The author knows a man who thus escaped from an otherwise inevitable death.

vile class which in those days were styled adventurers. Now we should call them assassins, and such they were, but by the former name were specially distinguished the bands made up, for the most part, of soldiers who had deserted from their colours to unite under a chief and pillage the country, making havoc of everything that came in their way.

Some were armed with breastplate or corselet, others with steel casques; these with swords, those with daggers or knives; many wore peaked hats from which fluttered feathers or ribbons, and either on the head or breast of each might be seen an image of the Madonna. Many, instead of shoes, wore sandals of goat-skin, with which they could get a better hold in scrambling about the mountains.

No need to describe their faces. As seen by the light of the lantern, with their long, untrimmed beards and moustaches and dishevelled heads, they presented the appearance of unchained demons.

One of them, throwing on the ground the partisan which he had been holding to the Mayor's throat, snatched away both his and his companion's side-arms, and shook their clothes to see if they had any others concealed.

During the scuffle, the spectre, shaking off the sheet, had turned into a living being; and conscious that there was no time to be lost, he had climbed up into the belfry and perched on a beam which rested on stones projecting from the wall; from which dark position, himself invisible, he could very well observe all that went on in the church, while he watched for an opportunity to escape.

In the meanwhile, the bandit chief (a young man who might have been about seventeen years of age, but of ferocious aspect, robust, and marked with a scar which seamed his forehead from one side to the other, describing eye-brows an inch higher than nature intended) gave the Mayor a kick under the ribs to induce him to get up; roaring at him, the while, as

though not endowed with the organs of speech.* No more efficacious remedy could have been adopted to rouse him from his stupefaction; he rose without waiting for a second dose, and was dragged with Don Michele into a corner, where they were bound and guarded by one of the miscreants, while the others took and counted the gold by the light of the lantern. After this, they put it in a leathern purse that the chief wore fastened to his girdle, and they all went out, placing the prisoners in their midst, and desiring them, in those courteous terms which men of their class are apt to use, to walk fast, if they did not wish to feel the points of their daggers.

After proceeding for about half a mile along the side of the mountain, where there was no trace of a path, they stopped, and bandaged the eyes of both.

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* His tongue had been cut out.

Terror had helped the Mayor to find his voice again, and he pleaded for mercy, crying like a child; this highly diverted the bandits, who let him go on.

But Don Michele, who at that pause, made up his mind to the worst, said between his teeth, "Now we are in for it!" He wanted to treat with them for his release; but at the first word, his mouth was closed by a blow which knocked two teeth down his throat. Unable either to speak or see, he kept his ears well open. He heard the robbers discuss the division of booty and prisoners; he heard them speak of ransom, and speculate which of the two was most likely to be able to pay the heaviest. Among various voices speaking a diversity of dialects (all, however, Italian), he distinguished one with a foreign and rather German accent; but in the middle of his observations, he felt himself seized by several arms and hoisted on to the shoulders of two men, who separated from the rest of the party without

his being able to guess what direction they were taking.

Their progress lasted more than an hour, broken by pauses during which the bearers rested, dropping their burden, not over-gently, to the ground. Don Michele, between the galling of his bonds, and the dread, natural even to a courageous man, of being killed like a dog by these ruffians, very soon had enough of this game, being, moreover, in considerable pain from the sharp edges of their armour which cut into him as he rested on their shoulders.

At last they stopped. The noise was heard of a heavy door opening. They entered, and slammed it behind them. Don Michele was then unbound, led a few steps forward, his eyes were unbandaged, and he found himself in a room to which a little moonlight penetrated through an aperture. In one of the walls was a low, narrow door, bound with iron and furnished with bolts; it was opened,

and a voice said to Don Michele, "Go in." He stooped to enter, and as he was feeling, with one foot foremost, whether there were any steps, a push in the back, from the butt-end of a pike, sent him to the bottom of a small staircase quicker than he would have wished, and in such fashion that it would have been impossible for him to have counted the number of steps. A bolt, which slipped creaking into its groove, warned Don Michele that there was no hope of escape through the door.

The place was very dark. He began by feeling his mouth which was very painful from the buffet he had received. He withdrew his hands, wet with what he knew must be blood, and discovered that he could no longer reckon on thirty-two teeth, but on thirty only.

"If the devil had but done his duty and strangled you and your father, those teeth would not have been sown among the brambles," muttered he, his thoughts reverting to his patron who had sent him on this errand.

However, he did his best to keep up his spirits, and, opening his arms wide, tried to make out his whereabouts. He noticed that a feeble light glimmered through a hole above, and he fancied he heard, outside, the waves of the sea breaking against the wall. Groping about, his feet came in contact with some soft straw. He stretched himself on it in anxious expectation of what Fortune might have in store for him.

CHAPTER X.

THE FAITHFUL GUARDIAN.

FALSTAFF.—"A plague of all cowards! Give me a cup of sack, rogue. Is there no virtue extant?"

King Henry IV.

THE reader will, doubtless, have guessed that the spectre was none other than the troop sergeant Boscherino; but he has still to be informed how the band of adventurers chanced to be at hand, to interrupt the trick played off by Don Michele. It happened on this wise.

Don Litterio had a pretty, fresh servant-girl, on whose score there existed grave doubts as

to the immaculateness of his conjugal fidelity. This girl, turning a ready ear to her master's quinquagenarian sighs, was none the less deaf to those of a stable-man, who served in the house. Through the connecting link of these amours, the Mayor's secret, viz. that he was going that night to dig up treasure, came to the groom's ears.

This latter had friends among the members of Pietraccio's band (this was the marauder in question), and he arranged matters so, that if the treasure were found, instead of the whole of it flowing into his master's pocket, at least some of it should find its way into his own.

Now before we return to Don Michele, it is necessary to describe to our readers, the locality where the events transpired that we are about to relate.

At the head of the bridge which leads to the small island of Santa Orsola, was erected a square massive tower, very similar to the one which may be noticed by travellers from Rome

to Sabina. The passage was closed by a large gate, by a portcullis which might be let down on occasion, and by a drawbridge. A spiral staircase connected two upper stories in which were lodged the soldiers and commandant; and at the top of all was a terrace surrounded by embrasures, through which projected the muzzles of two falconets. The Abbess of the Convent, invested with baronial rights, kept, as a guard, a company of eighty foot-soldiers, pikemen, and arquebusiers led by a certain German, Martin Schwarzenbach, a soldier of fortune, who found it more comfortable to live in that tower at his ease than to rough it on active service, where he had learnt that the charm of ill-treating and despoiling the natives was often counterbalanced by a bullet or the point of a partisan. His three ruling passions were pillaging, steering clear of hard knocks, and drinking as much Apulia wine as he could hold; and in this particular, a barrel would have stood but a poor chance with him.

These propensities were very obvious in his face; the two first in a pair of eyes equally expressive of avarice and cowardice; the last, in a brilliant red, which leaving the rest of his face pale, concentrated itself in his cheeks and nose. He had a scrubby beard (the colour of a he-goat's), purple lips, and a frame which would have been well fitted to support the fatigues of campaigning, had not his intemperance made it as flabby and enervated at forty years of age, as it might fairly have been at sixty. His sole duty consisted in shutting the gate at nightfall.

The armies which were waging war in the neighbourhood had no hostile designs against the Convent, so there was no need to guard against *them*. The bands of adventurers that scoured the country would not have dared to attack eighty men shut up in a good tower with two falconets. But in addition to the protection they afforded, Martin Schwarzenbach had another reason for enjoying peaceful

slumbers. He had engaged with the Abbess to guard the Convent, but he did not, on that account, consider himself in the least bound to be guardian and defender of the ducats, florins, and property of the inhabitants of the adjacent districts, or of any stray wayfarer. As, however, he could not openly levy black-mail on them, he had, in modern parlance, taken a share as partner in the business carried on by Pietraccio; and he backed him up with the forces at his disposal, whenever he had any enterprise on hand that required help; hiding money, property and even persons, if they were such as to warrant expectations of a fat ransom.

These operations were conducted with such strict precautions, that the injured would have thought of accusing anyone sooner than Martin, who had only the reputation of being the greatest wine-bibber in the country.

It was into his hands that Don Michele had fallen. He had passed the night wondering,

but unable to guess, where he could possibly be. At early dawn he heard three cannon-shots, which were fired every morning from the fortress of Barletta. He managed to climb up to the loop-hole through which the light entered; but the opening was so smothered with ivy, that nothing could be seen but a small expanse of sea. After he had remained on watch for some little time, a boat passed full of vegetables, and he recognised the rower as the gardener of Santa Orsola; then he felt almost certain he was at the bottom of the tower which defended the entrance to it.

Hardly had he descended from his post of observation, when the prison door opened, and two strong ruffians pulled him out, and dragged him up into the Captain's room.

This worthy had lately risen, and was sitting *en déshabille* on the side of his bed, before a table littered with the remains of an orgie. A rack, which ran round the wall, was furnished with pikes, arquebuses, iron breast-plates, and

other armour. He glanced at Don Michele, as he entered, with eyes that seemed hardly able to peer from beneath the wrinkled, drooping eye-lids which covered them, and drumming on the floor with the sole of one of his boots, he addressed him as follows:

"You must know, you sir (for I do not know your name), that whoever passes the night in my hostel is bound to pay a hundred golden florins, of ten lire each, of the mint of Florence, or, if preferred, of St. Mark's; otherwise, a cord round the neck, with a stone attached, and a sea-bath, absolve him from paying the reckoning. Which do you like best?"

"The best for me is likely to be the worst for you," boldly retorted Don Michele. "Last night you seized us two, but we were not alone in the chapel. There was some one there you did not see; but he saw you and recognised you; and at the present moment your villanies are known in Barletta, and soon *you*, and not *I*, will

have to take a sea-bath, unless you can prevent three or four hundred Catalani or Stradiotti from battering down this tower; or could persuade them to hang you on a battlement instead of sending you to make acquaintance with the water which, judging from what I see, you would be tasting for the first time."

This idea was suggested to him by the sight of a half-cask of wine, that the German kept at the head of his bed in lieu of saints and crucifix.

The high tone of this reply roused the Constable, who, pulling his cap over his ears, exclaimed:

"If you think you have to deal with a child and to frighten me with your bravado, in the first place, I warn you, I do not believe you; and in the second, that even if your Albanesi, or whatever you call them, were to come, I have no reason to fear either them, or the sea, or the battlements; and I do not see who is to prevent me stringing you up by the neck

at the present moment; but I prefer the ring of your florins to the croaking of the crows which would come to pick out your eyes. So, to the point! Here are writing materials; see that your money be forthcoming, and then you will be welcome to go where you please."

Don Michele took his time to reply, looking at him with a grin, as though, being in no apprehension for his safety, he was doubtful whether to take things seriously or as a joke. The Captain's irritation was about to break forth in, perhaps, something more than words, but the answer came in time:

"Constable, you like florins; you do not dislike wine; so you must be a good fellow! Those are all signs of a good soldier—extortion, gluttony, and irreligion! Now, what in the world induces you to make yourself disagreeable? I want to be friends with you. True, I owe it to myself to make you pay for the uncomfortable night you have made me pass; and if it were not . . . no matter . . .

I forgive you, and will even put you up to something good. . . ." (Here he turned and looked at the two who had brought him in and who still held him by the arm.) "Well, my lads, have you nothing to do that you are standing one on each side of me, like two guardian angels? Take yourself off, my fine fellow!" (said he, shaking off one, and giving him a playful tap on the face; then freeing himself, in like manner, from the other,) "You too, be off! you are no use. I can stand by myself. Go and keep a look-out for anyone coming along the road from Barletta, while I speak a few words to his lordship! You can see I have no weapons, and I have no intention of swallowing him fasting: my digestion is not quite up to that."

The soldiers, who were no less taken aback than Martin at such coolness, looked in their master's face to see what he thought of it. He nodded assent, and they went out; but as soon as he was alone with Don Michele, he

thought it prudent to stand up and keep within reach of his sword.

"Constable, you demanded a hundred florins for my ransom. I flattered myself I was worth more; and to teach you how to appraise one of my standing in the future, I will give you two hundred!" (The German opened his eyes wide, and his mouth watered.) "Yes, two hundred; and that would be a mere nothing . . . if I thought I could trust you to serve me faithfully and circumspectly . . . why then I might astonish you! but that is out of the question. You would have to be active, know when to speak and when to be silent; and besides, it would never do to have such a parsnip face, and bleary eyes, which look like pap swimming in oil."

This show of unmeasured confidence gave Martin food for reflection. Could it be a dream? It flashed across his mind that, perhaps, he had in his power some prince or great personage in disguise; but unable to fix

on any one in particular, and indignant at being bearded in his own domain, he asked:

"And who, in the name of the devil that brought you here, are you? and what do you want? Speak out, for I have had enough of this; and I have no idea of being made a fool of by anybody."

"Gently, gently! be civil; for if you jump down my throat I shall tell you nothing more, and so much the worse for you. You must know, then— —"

Here he was interrupted by the entrance of a soldier, who said:

"Constable, there is a cloud of dust on the road towards Barletta; it looks like cavalry; at least, Sandro says so, and he has the best sight of any of us."

The German started, and gazed blankly at his prisoner who laughed maliciously, and remarked:

"I told you so! but don't be alarmed. If you do but show a little sense, all will end well.

Go," added he, to the soldier, "and if anything fresh happens, you can let us know. Then, as I was about to say, you must know there is in this Convent a girl who is detained by certain persons whom it is unnecessary to mention. Now she would much prefer going about the world and enjoying herself, to being always mewed up with candles and crosses. It is not a case of dirty work at all. If, some night or other, a boat were to come with five or six young men to carry her off, and if the Constable were to hear a dog bark, or some feeble voice cry out for mercy (for you know women always cry out before they are touched), he would have nothing else to do but to keep quiet, and persuade himself it was only a dream; turn over and go on snoring, and this slight service would bring him in, as though heaven-sent, five hundred new zequins of the mint of St. Mark, or of the Lily if he preferred it, and perhaps a better engagement, to boot, than he has with these devotees."

Poor Martin, who, with all his vices, possessed one virtue, viz. fidelity to those who paid him, at such a tempting offer felt he was in danger of losing even this one. But the law that nothing shall exist in the world either altogether good or altogether bad, saved him from total shipwreck, and he intended by his answer to show that he was offended; however, it was so framed as to savour more of regret than anger:

"Martin Schwarzenbach, during the course of his career, has served Milan, Venice, and the Emperor; and he has never betrayed any one of them. The Abbess of Sant' Orsola has paid him up to December 1503. If you are . . . how can I tell what? . . . some lord, perhaps, or levying troops for some Italian Prince, and like to engage me, all right; we will talk it over. I will show you the company. There are fifty pikes and thirty halberds, all from twenty to forty years of age; and as for the accoutrements, you will see if

there is the tongue of a buckle missing. If we come to terms, on the 1st of January 1504 we will come and attack the Convent and carry them all off, down to the cook. But up to that time, as long as I have a charge of powder or trusty blade, no one shall touch a hair either of one of the nuns or of the meanest lay sister."

"And do you suppose, Sir Martin, that I am ignorant of the duties of one in your position? Do you think I should have the face to propose any such villany to you? You misunderstand me. The person to whom I allude is neither nun nor lay sister, and has as much to do with the Convent as that half-barrel at your side. Bless you! you are an upright man, and no mistake. You know, when one can walk it is folly to run; when one can sleep under shelter, with a glass of good Greek wine, it is sheer madness to sleep in the open, with nothing to drink. And whoever has the chance, providentially, of earning five hundred florins,

without trouble or loss of honour, ought to remember that such a piece of luck does not drop into his mouth every day like ripe figs. . . . Now, if you have any sense, we can come to terms; but you must make up your mind quickly, for those horsemen will be here shortly."

Martin's virtue, like that of many other men of honour, was not proof against a bribe, so he answered:

"Oh, if the nuns are not concerned, it is quite a different question."

As Don Michele hesitated, before speaking, whether he should, then and there, reveal to Martin who the woman was whom he proposed to carry off, a scuffle at the door of the room, between two soldiers and an old woman, interrupted their conversation.

"The devil take you, you hump-backed hag! Someone 's there on business, and the Constable has something else to do than listen to you."

Such was the exclamation of one of those soldiers, as he tried to hinder the entrance of a deformed dwarfish old woman whose eyes resembled mother-of-pearl buttons with scarlet rims. She had forced her way partly in, but the soldier still held her grasped round the neck, straining her skin so tight, that it twisted her mouth all on one side. The old beldame gave the hand that held her such a severe scratch with her nails of steel, that she effected her instant release; and bounding, like a spring set free from its catch, on to Don Michele, she clung to him, and thus avoided a blow aimed after her, which she would have found no joke if it had hit its mark.

"Take that, base-born wretch!" she screeched, turning round on the soldier, who, sucking the blood from the scratch, glared at the old woman as a mastiff does at a cat which has combed its muzzle; "take that, and if you try it on again you shall have worse."

"And you ugly witch, just try coming

again when I am on guard. . . . Dear Sandro, be obliging!" (he said these words, curling his lower lip backwards over his teeth to mimic the old woman's voice,) "let me go into the Convent . . . just for one moment, to speak to the foreign lady, and ask her for a little lint for Scannaprete who is wounded, and a little powder for Paciocco who has the fever. . . . A little rope" (here he resumed his natural voice) "to throttle you and whoever sent you. Just come back again, and see how you will like it. May my tongue be torn out of my throat, as Valenza, to his credit, tore out your rascal of a master's, if I do not send you away with your deserts, sorceress that you are!"

The old woman would have been quite ready with an answer, and so have avoided infringing one of the fundamental laws of the feminine code, viz. that of always having the last word; but, as it happened, she had urgent matters to communicate, so she turned her back on Sandro

with an expression of scorn, more easily imagined than described.

"If you do not interfere," (she was addressing the Constable,) "there will be fine work! There have been the devil's own games going on to-night in the bush. The men returned an hour before daybreak, bringing with them that ugly Christian you took last night. Holy Virgin! he looked like a corpse! But his fright did not last long. Pietraccio ripped him up like a sucking-pig."

"What!" exclaimed Martin and Don Michele both at once; "have they murdered the mayor? Why? where? how?"

"Hey! there 's not much to tell you! Pietraccio tried to make him comprehend that he would have to pay so many ducats as a ransom; and you know, without a tongue, it is difficult to make oneself understood. He stood with his eyes fixed, glazed, and vacant. Then the chief wrote down on a piece of paper what was wanted, and tried to get him to read. Worse

and worse! He looked like the statue of San Rocco, in the Chapel of Belfiore. Pietraccio then gave him three or four stinging blows in the face; but it was all no good. At last he sprang upon him . . . and you know when he *does* spring . . . he lifted his knife and drove it in beneath the belt, making a downwards slit so deep that he could not pull it out again. The old men are quite ashamed of him. But what could you expect? He is a bad youth. I have, over and over again, said to his mother, 'Ghita, that boy is too ready with his hands' . . . but it is impossible to keep him quiet."

This news, and the manner of relating it, struck both listeners dumb, though from different motives.

The old woman continued:

"Now I have done, and will be off, for I have been on my feet since yesterday. We had lain down to sleep for an hour, when up runs Cocco d'Oro. 'Holloa! look alive! the

Sheriff! the Court! Up we jumped; there was nothing else for it. They were already below Malagrotta, and were on our traces. Off we started, as fast as our legs could carry us up the mountain. Now they are all shut up in the grotto of Focognano, without a loaf or drop of water; and there are two hundred soldiers and bailiffs hunting through the bush. God grant no evil may befall any of the men! So look sharp, and see what you can do to help matters. . . . They must have found the Mayor murdered . . . won't that make a fine row! and Ghita says, 'Don't forget they have nothing to eat!' so send them something as soon as you can."

As she finished speaking, she saw on the table the remains of the supper, and proceeded to help herself without going through the form of asking leave. She quickly filled her apron with slices of bread, pieces of meat and fruit; emptied into a gourd, which she carried round her neck, the wine which remained; drank

what it would not hold; and wiping her mouth with the back of her hand, departed, giving Sandro a push to get out of the way, and vouchsafing no leave-taking whatever to the other two.

Martin found he had too much to think of at once, and his head would not stand it. With one hand behind his back, and the other tugging at his beard, he walked about the room, shaking his head and puffing. The sudden movement among the people of Barletta warned him to give credence to Don Michele, who had so confidently predicted it, and made him think he must really be the important personage he gave himself out to be. He decided, first of all, to square matters with Don Michele, for fear the latter should expose him to those who would soon be coming in search of the Mayor's murderers. So putting his pride in his pocket, in a fawning tone he assured him he might reckon on him for help in his enterprise.

They had just come to an understanding, when they heard the tramp of several horses on the bridge, and a voice, clear and strong as a trumpet, shout out several times, "Constable! Schwarzenbach!" He went down, and found Fieramosca and Fanfulla da Lodi, who were waiting for him at the head of a troop of cavalry.

The reader will remember to have seen the name of the second one in the list of Italian champions.

Among all the soldiers in the armies of Italy, no more dashing spirit than he was to be found. For the most trifling cause, and often for no cause at all, he would expose his life to any sort of risk. Heedless, all he cared for was diversion or fighting. Agile as a leopard, with well-strung nerves and a light vigorous body, it seemed as though Nature, anticipating its being inhabited by a soul rash even to madness, had taken care to form it in the most fitting guise for bearing the

unt of constant exposure to perilous adventures.

Son of a certain Girolamo Riario, he had lived among soldiers from his infancy, and been in the pay of all the States of Italy in turn; quarrels, disobedience to orders—and sometimes sheer fickleness—leading to a perpetual change of masters. The Florentines had been his latest ones, and he had decamped from them in consequence of the exploit I am about to relate.

While encamped under the walls of Pisa, an assault was made, which would inevitably have resulted in the capture of the town, had not Paolo Vitelli, the Captain, sounded the retreat and restrained, even by main force, the Florentine soldiers who, full of ardour, were following up their first advantage. Vitelli's conduct, taxed at Florence with treachery, was afterwards, as everyone knows, the cau[illegible] is death. Fanfulla, always in the first [illegible] reached the top of the ladder, and c[illegible]

a battlement, with his brandished sword, he made a clearance round him. Already had he gained the wall, dealing such furious blows and thrusts, that there would soon have been room for the others to follow him.

At this juncture the retreat was sounded, and he was left alone. Exasperated at having to retire, he descended fuming, roaring with rage, amidst a tempest of darts, stones, and bullets which fell harmlessly around him. Safe and sound, he returned to the camp like a madman, abusing everyone he met. In the Captain's tent the Florentine Commissioners were holding council with Vitelli. Fanfulla sprang, infuriated, into the midst of them, calling them traitors; and with a stick which he picked up, he showered on them, irrespectively, such a hailstorm of blows, kicks, cuffs and pushes that, as he was extremely powerful, and they were completely taken by surprise, he put them to dire confusion. There they were, all sprawling on the ground, before they

could recognise the author of their discomfiture.

After this escapade, he jumped on horseback without making his adieux, as you may well believe, and was already far from the camp when the chiefs, having regained their feet, began to think of arresting him.

Having, in this fashion, left the Florentines, he engaged himself to Prospero Colonna; and was now in Barletta with the rest of the company.

The information Boscherino brought of the Mayor's capture by bandits (given so as to turn aside all suspicion from himself) had set in motion the Sheriff with the whole body of bailiffs in Barletta, and they had started off towards the mountain. Fieramosca and Fanfulla followed with some horsemen, and sending the officers of justice on in front, they had stopped to guard the entrance of the valley where the Chapel stood.

The bailiffs having handed over to them two

prisoners who had been taken with considerable trouble, they escorted them to the tower commanded by Martin Schwarzenbach.

When this latter went down to the gateway, he found the two miscreants waiting, in the midst of the soldiers, for the prison to be opened. One was the bandit chief Pietraccio, a ferocious youth, with the build and aspect of a savage. A tuft of tangled red hair fell over his eyes, and his naked arms, still smeared with the Mayor's blood, were tied across his chest with a cord which cut into the flesh. He had the abject and baffled look of a wolf caught in a trap. The other was a tall, beautifully formed woman; hardships, however, familiarity with crime, and desperation induced by her present state, made her appear many years older than she really was. In consequence of having been disabled by a wound, which she received in her head while defending herself, she had to be carried in the arms of two soldiers. They let her down on the pave-

ment, and the renewed pain of the wound, caused by the jolt, made her open her eyes and give a deep groan, while the blood, trickling down her forehead, stained her face and chest. Don Michele's lately vacated prison was opened, and she and Pietraccio were thrust in, bound as they were.

Having got rid of them, the soldiers returned to the bush to see if there were any more prisoners to be picked up. Fanfulla went up to the Constable's room, and Ettore seized the opportunity of repairing to the strangers' quarters.

The two women were surprised to see him at such an unexpected hour; so, the first greetings over, he told them on what errand he was come to the Convent, and gave an account of their chase after the banditti. He mentioned that, besides the Chief, they had taken a woman who made a stand at the entrance of a grotto where they were lurking, had wounded several bailiffs, and at last was

knocked down herself by a blow on the head from a bill-hook.

Ginevra, touched at her misfortune, wished to go to her relief. She rose, took what she considered suitable, from a cupboard where she kept several sorts of powders and ointments (which, as we have seen, were sometimes called into requisition by the assassins themselves), and begged Fieramosca to ask the Constable for the key of the prison.

He, straightway, proceeded up the winding staircase to Martin's room, and, as he approached the door, heard a scuffling noise, of which he could not conceive the cause. He pushed open the door which was ajar, and saw Fanfulla in the middle of the room, holding a two-handed sword, and flourishing it about as though he were playing a game of single-stick. He fenced and parried, made passes and gave cuts, with such rapidity, that it was next to impossible to follow the gyrations of his sword in the air; he could not have done more if

he had had to defend himself against a whole army.

Ettore, who was about to enter, stopped short to avoid receiving a slash, and looked on smiling at this mad jousting, which the other continued, unconscious that he was being watched. The blows, dealt at random, unfortunately for the master of the house, did not appear always to have spent themselves in the air. Whether by accident, or malice prepense, one of them had put an end to the long services of the half-barrel which stood under the bed, and divided it in half like a walnut; the liquid it contained flowing down in a stream to the lowest part of the pavement.

"The *Vin Santo* is being drawn off late this year," at length said Fieramosca, laughing. Fanfulla turned round at the voice, let the sword fall at his feet, and threw himself backwards on the bed in an insane fit of laughter.

"What have you been about? You ought to be shut up as a lunatic! Just look! We

arrived half an hour ago, and you have done more mischief than a company of Catalini would have done in a week. . . . And where 's Martin ? "

Fanfulla gradually sobered down, and answered :

" He was here a short time ago. He told me that none but Swiss and Germans know how to use the two-handed sword. I said it was quite true, and begged him to give me a lesson. In my efforts to do my best, I made a notch in the barrel (hang me if I did it on purpose), and he got quite cross about it. Can you fancy such a churl ! he would make no allowance for me ! And yet he knows so well that we poor Italians cannot handle a sword properly ! In fact, we came to bad words, and off he went swearing and blustering. What would you have done in my place ? Though not particularly keen about fighting with such a fine fencer as he is, I told him to go to the devil, and added, ' If you will go

down to the meadow before the tower, I will give you a notch on your German noddle, to prove to you that the one on the barrel was purely accidental.' "

"And what answer did he make?"

"He told me to get out, for my presence was offensive to him."

As he finished this description, Fanfulla rolled about on the bed, laughing, and throwing everything on it up into the air. Such really was the state of the case; and the Captain, not caring to have anything to do with this dare-devil, besides being pierced to the soul for the loss of his wine, went up, cursing in German, to a loft on the second floor where Don Michele was in hiding. From this stronghold he overheard Fanfulla's account, and, from time to time, raised his voice to load him with abuse which the other returned with interest, by way of parenthesis, continuing his narrative all the same.

Fieramosca, who had no mind for this sort

of foolery, interfered, and, not without difficulty, made it up between them. Martin came down, Fanfulla went away laughing, and Ettore (who could hardly restrain himself also from laughing, as the German contemplated the two parts of the barrel with the eye of a miser who has found his chest broken open and rifled) made known Ginevra's wish to go into the prison, and courteously requested that it might be unlocked.

The Constable, meanwhile, had set up on end the two pieces of barrel, and was endeavouring, by soaking a cloth like a sponge and squeezing it into these receptacles, to save some of the relics of his discomfiture.

When he heard Ginevra's request, he grumbled out:

"What next? Murderers seem to find some one to take care of them, while a poor man who minds his own business, and would not even hurt a fly, meets with madmen who sack his house."

"My dear Sir Martin, you have every reason to be angry; but, you see, *I* had nothing to do with it."

And pray, what consolation is that to me? Did I invite him to come and play the fool in my house?"

Fieramosca persisted.

"Well! well! return in half an hour, and you shall go into the prison. . . . May you all die there!" he muttered between his teeth; but Fieramosca was half-way downstairs, and could not hear him.

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CHAPTER XI.

THE CAVALCADE.

"The late repentance of that hour,
When Penitence hath lost her power
To tear one terror from the grave,
And will not soothe, and cannot save."

The Giaour.

THE capture of Pietraccio and his mother was an accident which might entail serious consequences on Martino, and frustrate the execution of Don Michele's plans. They discussed the subject, and agreed that it was necessary to let the assassin escape, in order that he should not be taken to Barletta, where he might divulge more than was convenient concerning the Captain's conduct. But it was not easy to

find any means of effecting his release, save by the connivance of the guard set over him.

When Fieramosca came to ask for admittance into the prison, upset as Martin was by his dispute with Fanfulla, he could not, on the spur of the moment, judge whether this would interfere with or forward his views. However, he had sense enough to take time, and confiding in the astuteness of his new friend, went back to him in hopes that he would find some way out of the dilemma. When Don Michele heard of Fieramosca's request he exclaimed:

"He could not have played into our hands better if we had paid him for it! Leave it to me, Constable, and you will see how neatly I shall go to work. But . . . remember! . . ."

"All right! no occasion to say more about it. But . . . the nuns . . ."

"The nuns . . ." rejoined Don Michele laughing, "we shall not touch them; make yourself easy on that score. Now give me

the keys of the prison, and wait for me here." He took the keys, went down to the ground floor, gently opened the door, and listened. Hearing the mother and son talking, he stopped on the first of the four or five steps which led down into the dungeon, where, craning his neck, he could see and hear all that passed. The woman had been placed on the ground, and her head propped up by a piece of timber which lay in one corner; but pain having brought on a high fever, as she tossed about, her head slipped down on to the damp clay soil, and she had not strength to raise herself again.

Her son, whose arms were tied so tight across his chest that he could not move a finger, tried in vain to assist her; at last, in despair, he knelt down beside her, vacantly rolling his eyes to and fro, from his mother's face to the wall.

The woman endeavoured every now and then to lift her head, but was too weak to do so

by herself. At last her son, with much difficulty, succeeded in furthering one of these efforts by pushing his knees beneath, and so enabled her to resume her former position; but so great was the torture caused by this movement, that she raised her hands to her head, and groaned out:

"Plague take the Calabrian clown's bill-hook! but if the devil will but grant me two minutes . . . I wish you to know who you are. . . . What good would it do me to pray to the saints? Much heed they paid when I used to pray to them!" So saying, she turned her glazed eye-balls towards the vault, and uttered blasphemies enough to make the hair of anyone else but Pietraccio stand on end.

"However," she continued, her fit of ferocious desperation changing into another still more painful and profound, "once there was a time when I, too, hoped for pardon . . . when I used to sing with the other nuns . . . bad luck to the hour when I set foot over that

threshold . . . but what matter? I belonged to the devil before I was born . . . I have tried to escape from him . . . and now this is the end of it all." Again raising her eyes to Heaven with an unutterable expression of despair, she moaned: "Art thou content?"

Then turning to her son: "But, if you can get out of this place. . . . if you are a man . . . the author of your ruin and of my death will burn with me for ever, if the priests tell the truth. That night in Rome, when I posted you at the corner of the Tor Sanguigna to kill that gentleman, and you, like a fool, cried out before striking, and so they took and mutilated you just as you are, . . . it was Cesar Borgia! . . . When he was studying in Pisa (I was staying in the convent) he fell in love with me; and I, fool that I was, with him! How could I tell who he was? . . . One night he came to me . . . I had a little girl seven years old . . . she woke up; she was sleeping in an adjoining closet . . . she saw him

climbing in through the window, she began to cry out . . . woe to him if they had discovered him . . . he had just been made Bishop of Pampeluna . . . he threw the cushions on her head . . . and knelt on them . . . monster! . . . I fell on the floor . . . Swear to me, as I am a dying woman, that you will kill him; make a sign with your head that you swear it . . . at least do that much . . ."

The assassin, staring horribly at his mother, bowed his head in token of acquiescence, and she, taking from her neck a chain she wore under her dress, added: "And when you have pierced him to the heart, say to him, 'Look at this chain!' shake it before his eyes: 'my mother returns it to you.' I have not done yet . . . Oh! for one moment more! then I shall have no fear of you . . . When I recovered my senses, I found myself lying on the bed, and you were . . . oh! I cannot say it . . . by the side of poor Inez. Oh, how beautiful though wast! And now thou art in

Paradise! . . and I, I, why must I go to hell?"

These words were accompanied by a howl which shook the whole building, and so she breathed her last.

Pietraccio was not very much agitated. With a stupified expression, he watched his mother's convulsive movements. When he saw that she had expired, he retired into the most distant corner, and crouched down just like a wild beast, which, if shut up in a cage with the dead body of one of its own species, feels an instinctive repulsion and shrinks away from it.

He had only in part comprehended this incoherent tale, disclosed, as it was, in a state bordering on delirium. One idea, however, took a certain hold of him, viz. that he was to revenge himself on Cesar Borgia for several injuries, but principally, it appeared to him, for the condition to which he had been reduced through this man's barbarity.

This same account had, however, affected Valentino's agent in a very different manner. To any looker-on, at that moment, it must have seemed as though every word uttered by the woman drained a portion of his life out of him, so changed was his countenance. When the woman fell back on the pavement, he was as near as possible doing the same.

He descended with an unsteady gait, with trembling hands cut the cord which bound Pietraccio, fixed his eyes for a moment on the chain which he had already placed round his neck, and said:

"A lady and gentleman will presently come to visit you. They are anxious to liberate you, but do not want it to be supposed that it is their doing. Look sharp! and while they are seeing if the woman is past help, you make for the staircase; run, and take care not to be caught, for there is a price set on your head."

After these words, spoken hurriedly as though he were standing on red-hot coals, he

furtively bestowed a shuddering glance on the woman, left the dagger in Pietraccio's hands, and was back like lightning in the Constable's room. In its proper place will be told why such a consummate scoundrel should have been disconcerted by the foregoing scene.

The reader will, perchance, say: But shall we never have done with all these horrors, murders, traitors, prisons, deaths, demons, and even worse!

If we have guessed his thoughts correctly, he (begging his pardon) has not guessed ours, for, just at that moment, we had made up our minds to have done with them—to send to the devil Don Michele, Pietraccio, and Martin (for we may mention in confidence that we were beginning somewhat to weary of them ourselves), and to change the scene to the fortress of Barletta, which we shall find considerably altered from what it was last time we went there with Don Michele.

The courtyard and galleries were hung with

many-coloured silk tapestries, with garlands of myrtle and laurel forming festoons and cyphers, while from window and balcony waved the banners of the army. The crowd, composed of idle spectators as well as of men busied about the preparations, swarmed everywhere; crushing here, and dispersing there, about the courtyard, staircases, and galleries. Soldiers, workmen, servants, boys passed to and fro, laden with tools, ladders, and stores of all kinds for furnishing the banqueting room, and adorning the theatre. There came pouring in provisions, fruit, wine, and game, which the chief men of the town and army vied with one another in presenting to the Spanish Captain. There was nothing else but coming and going, calling out and shouting to one another; in fact a scene of the utmost confusion.

As the tower clock struck fourteen,* the

* Reckoning, as before said, from the Ave Maria of the previous evening.

great Captain made his appearance with all his barons on the top of the outer staircase. A courier had arrived a short time previously, to announce his daughter's arrival within three miles of Barletta; and he wished, by the splendour of his own attire and that of his cortége, to show his delight at seeing her again.

Over a vest of rich cloth of gold he wore a brilliant violet velvet cape trimmed with sable, and on his head a cap to match. From a magnificent sapphire which acted as a clasp, there sprang a plume, not much more than a span in length, entirely composed of fine pearls threaded on steel wires, which waved about over his brows as though it were a real feather. His sword and dagger (their sheaths likewise of violet velvet) sparkled with gems, and on his left breast was embroidered a red sword, the ensign of the Order of San Jago.

At the foot of the staircase he found a white Catalan mule covered down to the ground with a caparison of violet shot silk, stitched

with gold. As soon as he was settled in his saddle, his suite mounted, and they all set off together to meet Donna Elvira.

Prospero and Fabrizio Colonna, dressed in rose-coloured samite embroidered with silver, rode beside him on two of the finest Turkish horses which had been seen in Italy for a long time. The two cousins, now in the prime of life, showed to such advantage on those high velvet saddles, skilfully restraining the capers of their steeds, that they looked, every inch, the great soldiers they were, and the best condottieri of the day.

In the crowd which followed might be recognised, by his robust and austere aspect, Pedro Navarro, inventor of the mines employed with such success at the capture by assault of Castel dell' Uovo. Diego Paredes, the Hercules of the period, seldom encased himself in anything but steel, and had no clothes ready suitable for the occasion; his preparations were, therefore, limited to seeing that his arms

were better furbished than usual, and to selecting the most ferocious among his numerous war-horses. This was a large Calabrian stallion which had been running wild till a few weeks before, tall, strong-limbed, black as a raven, and not a coloured hair anywhere about it.

None but Paredes would have either dared or been able to ride this wild beast which, accustomed to forest life, became maddened by the din and crowd, and snorted and foamed like a lion.

But the knight's stature, his heavy armour and a curb a foot long, which made the horse's mouth bleed, kept it under control, and after several violent plunges at starting (everybody giving it a wide berth), it wisely gave in to Diego Garcia, who, nailed, as it were, to his saddle bow, mocked its vain efforts to dislodge him.

The flower of the Italian youth came on in company with the Spanish barons. Ettore

Fieramosca, riding between his two dearest friends, Inigo Lopez de Ayala and Brancaleone, wore a mantle of blue satin embroidered in silver, the work and gift of the women of Santa Orsola. He had the credit of being the most perfect horseman in the army. The steed he now bestrode, silver grey with a dark mane, given him by Signor Prospero, was handled by him with such consummate skill that it seemed to understand its master's will without recourse to either spur or bridle. It appeared as though Fieramosca had the art of always cutting the first figure in everything and in any company.

Of admirable proportions, his perfect symmetry was set off by a close-fitting white satin garb which, especially about the legs and thighs, fitted him without a wrinkle; and such were his comeliness and graceful carriage that he became the cynosure of all eyes. The young man was conscious of this triumph, but almost blushed as he caught himself in an ap-

proach to vanity which is only just excusable in the other sex.

The squires of these chieftains brought up the rear. As custom then prescribed, each lord sought to attach to his service men of diverse nations, and the more outlandish and barbaric their appearance so much the greater their value; consequently, there now paraded before the eyes of the multitude Turkish spahis, with scimitars and cuirasses fashioned like scales; men from the kingdom of Grenada armed with Moorish javelins; archers from Tartary arrayed in bright colours, and carrying silver bows and quivers; these last were two of Prospero Colonna's grooms. There were negroes from Upper Egypt armed with long darts; and the barbarous physiognomies of these races contrasting with European faces, constituted a picture replete with charm and variety.

Consalvo, as he set forth, was saluted by the discharge of all the artillery mounted in

the towers and galleries of the Castle, and by the bells ringing a merry peal. Every now and then, through all this uproar, pierced the sound of divers instruments and the braying of trumpets, the whole producing a certain harmony which, if not exactly in time, at any rate, expressed the martial spirit that animated the army.

Just at this moment, information was brought the great Captain that the Duc de Nemours and his barons had already entered Barletta; so he stopped, and sent some of his suite to meet them, and a few minutes afterwards the French appeared on the opposite side of the piazza.

The Duke, perceiving that Consalvo had dismounted and was advancing to meet him, got off his horse, and after they had shaken hands and exchanged greetings, the Frenchman politely observed that it would be a breach of good manners on his part if, when invited to a fête, he should prove a disturbing element,

as must be the case if, on his account, the father were to delay one instant embracing his daughter. Aware that the procession was on its way to meet her, he begged that he might be allowed to accompany it, not doubting that though the war rendered them enemies, the Spanish captain would nevertheless believe him to be one of the foremost of those who appreciated his valour, talent, and other eminent qualities. This address elicited, as was its due, a gracious response. The two chiefs remounted and led the way; their suite followed pell-mell, amidst an interchange of those courtesies of which the French have, in every age, been masters.

The cortége came to a standstill about a mile outside the gate, when the troop which escorted Donna Elvira's litter was descried in the distance.

She was accompanied by Vittoria Colonna, Fabrizio's daughter, who afterwards married the Marquis of Pescara, and became illustrious

for virtue, talent, and fortitude. Consalvo dismounted, hurried to embrace his daughter who had alighted from her litter, and pressed her in his arms, calling her, over and over again, "*Hija de mi Alma!*"* and overwhelming her with caresses which formed a striking contrast to the mature gravity of his ordinary demeanour.

Ettore and Inigo had been selected by him to act as squires to his daughter, so they came forward leading a palfrey for her to ride. The young Italian bent one knee to the ground, and the damsel, lightly resting the point of her foot on the other, sprang into her saddle with the utmost grace. Fieramosca's pale face slightly flushed when, as he rose, Donna Elvira returned him thanks with a smile and glance which showed how pleased she was at the selection of such a handsome young man for her squire.

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* Daughter of my soul.

Her character (perhaps her father's extreme tenderness was in some degree responsible) was deficient in the amount of sense which might be expected in a girl of twenty. Her warm heart and vivacious fancy were not always tempered with that right judgment so seldom found in either sex, but which, however, after virtue, is the most precious jewel of the soul.

Amply endowed with this quality, her friend Vittoria Colonna joined to it the acumen and sprightliness of a ready wit. Though both possessed equal claims to the title of beauty, yet it would have been impossible to find two more dissimilar types of loveliness. Donna Elvira's flashing eyes and ready smiles (of which she was, perhaps, all the more lavish from a consciousness that they enhanced her beauty) fascinated at first sight; whereas, in the grand and truly Roman outlines of Fabrizio's daughter, in her fine features (a Greek sculptor's *beau ideal* of the Muses), lighted up

by a peculiar divine expression which ever and anon swept across her brow, there lurked a subtle charm which captivated unawares all hearts, and evoked sentiments of lasting affection and admiration. A sagacious eye might have fancied it detected in her a tinge of pride; if such there were, it was kept in check and made subservient to good by her nobility of mind.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BULL FIGHT.

"Once more! once more! in dust and gore to ruin must thou reel!
In vain! in vain! thou tearest the sand with furious heel.
In vain! in vain! thou noble beast! I see, I see thee stagger.
Now keen and cold thy neck must hold the stern Alcayde's dagger."

Spanish Ballads.

THE party, on its return to Barletta, alighted at the Castle. The new guests were lodged in the best rooms, and, the retinue having dispersed, everyone began to prepare for the

revels and jousts which were to take place during the day.

On the piazza had been erected a palisade round which ran tiers of wooden benches, their rudeness disguised as much as possible by improvised decorations. Below, a row of sheds had for several days past been filled with bulls, bullocks and wild buffaloes, procured for the spectacle in which the Italians of those times took such delight, and in which the highest nobles did not disdain to take a part. The tournament was to follow on the same ground, which had been levelled and well adapted for the purpose. It was already thronged with people, and the roofs, windows and all elevated points were crammed with spectators. The sergeants and squires, in parti-coloured doublets, awaited Consalvo's appearance in the piazza which had been swept and watered.

He arrived shortly, with all his guests, having on his right the Duc de Nemours, and on his left Donna Elvira. He rode first round

the enclosure, then dismounted at a larger and more gaily decked stage at one end; and, amidst the cheers and applause with which the populace ever readily greets any display in dress, or such-like gorgeous parade, they all sat down, and the signal was given to let loose the first bull.

When the pen was opened, there ensued a truce to the hum of the crowd, as well as to the contentions that, on similar occasions, inevitably arise among the spectators in their efforts to secure the best seats. A large bull rushed into the arena, its head and shoulders as black as a coal, and hind-quarters of a dark grey. For some time it bounded about, lashing its tail, till, seeing there was no way out, it stopped, rolled its bloodshot eyes suspiciously, and began pawing up the sand.

Just then, the noise occasioned by a brawl between two men, attracted the eyes of all to one corner. The cause of the commotion was not apparent, and in order to explain it to our

readers, we must return for an instant to the women of Santa Orsola.

That evening when Fieramosca told them about the projected combat with the French, Ginevra was not the only one to tremble at the prospect of the danger to which he would be exposed. Zoraide, likewise, was greatly cast down at the news. Often does a proud and spirited nature go hand in hand with an unimpressible heart; but should Love succeed in forcing an entrance, oh! how great is the havoc! Henceforth peace, sleep, and repose were strangers to her pillow. Her mind was occupied by an absorbing passion. She was equally incapable of diverting her thoughts from one persistently recurring round, or of settling down to any regular occupation. Now and then, for a few minutes at a time, she would sit down before her loom to work at the embroidery of Ettore's mantle; but soon she would rise, pass out on to the balcony, and spend hours absently plucking off the vine-

tendrils and overshadowing leaves, or she would go out hastily, as if she had something to do of the greatest importance; then, as though in a reverie, she would slacken her pace and stand still, with her eyes fixed on the ground, ever seeking solitude, and especially anxious to escape observation from Ginevra, who, she fancied, every moment, must detect her cherished secret.

Ginevra, for her part, was not less agitated; and perhaps there was even deeper cause for the tumultuous emotions to which she was a prey. The affection she bore the young Italian, begotten and nourished by their old intimacy and by her great obligations to him, was intensified by their misfortune, by the dread that a glorious death might possibly cut him off for ever, and (since nothing is more apt than obstacles to inflame both mind and heart) by the virtuous remorse which admonished her that it was her bounden duty to endeavour, by all means in her power, to return to her hus-

band, and withdraw from the company of one who, notwithstanding their mutual virtue, kept her always on the brink of a precipice. She remembered that she had made a vow to the Convent's patron saint, that she would apprize Ettore of her resolution to leave him. She sought excuses for her neglect in the reflection that he had forestalled her communication, by his announcement of the challenge; but conscience urged, that if this might have justified some delay, it ought by no means to affect the ultimate fulfilment of her vow.

Beside these anxieties, of a sufficiently tormenting nature, she had conceived a grievous suspicion with respect to her friend. Women have a sort of intuition, almost to be called an instinct, which guides them to the detection of Love, however jealously it may be hidden away in the recesses of the heart. Before long it struck Ginevra that Zoraide was no longer the same as formerly. She but too well divined

the cause of the change in her. Thus the two friends passed their days, but there was an end to their previous loving and careless familiarity.

Meanwhile, the only topic of conversation in the Convent, between Gennaro the gardener, the lay sisters and the victuallers of the tower, was the forthcoming fête at Barletta; and any who, from time to time, went there on business brought back grand accounts of the preparations and anticipated gaieties; so that when the happy morning arrived, all who were not absolutely unable, started off at break of day to the city to secure places. The gardener, who, like all southerners, was mad after amusements, dressed in his best suit, and with a smart bouquet in his hat, was about to step into his boat, almost before the dawn, when Zoraide made her appearance at the top of the flight of steps which led down to the sea. She was attired with greater care than either the place or hour seemed to require.

"Gennaro," she said, "I am going with you to Barletta."

These words she pronounced with such unusual hesitation, that Gennaro, accustomed to her short and decisive manner of speech, stood staring at her for a moment before he replied that he was at her service, that he was highly honoured, and that he was only sorry he had not swept out the boat and put in a cloth, so that she might be more comfortable.

"But I'll be back directly—it won't take me a minute," he said, and was going off to fetch what he wanted, when Zoraide seized his arm and squeezed it so tight, that the gardener gazed into her eyes and thought to himself, "Is she mad, or possessed?"

The damsel had left Ginevra still in bed. She did not wish to enter into explanations concerning her trip which could not fail to seem strange, as it was the first time of her going outside the Convent walls. Every moment their departure was delayed, she dreaded

to see her friend appear on the scene. Therefore, curtly, and with a voice of command rather than entreaty, she hurried the gardener into his boat, and was conveyed by him to the town. The whole time he was rowing he never stopped chattering, telling her that he would escort her about everywhere, that he was a friend of Consalvo's valet, and that he, better than anyone else, could find her a place to enjoy the fêtes.

They reached the piazza just as Consalvo was leaving the Castle, with his own and the French barons, to meet Donna Elvira; and all Zoraide's entreaties that he would not leave her were of no avail to stop Gennaro from following the cavalcade, amid the dust and press of the crowd. However, he conducted her to Veleno's inn, and told her not to be uneasy, for he would return immediately.

Delayed longer than he expected, it was somewhat late before he fulfilled his promise; and when he tried to take her to the piazza to

secure a position on the platform, he found it full of spectators, and saw at a glance that there was no hope of finding a seat for himself or his companion. By dint of elbowings and objurgations to the rabble which swarmed behind the stages, he forced his way through as far as the opening by which the combatants entered the arena; but from this spot nothing was to be seen but the legs of spectators dangling over their heads, and he was in despair at having proved such an incompetent escort. Fortunately for him, just as the bull was let loose, Fanfulla da Lodi, who officiated as provost of the games, was coming out of the arena, and remarked Zoraide, who was looking disconsolately about her. The gardener caught his eye, and appealed to him for help, saying:

"Your Excellency, look at this poor lady, who is dying to see the jousts, and we have come too late."

Zoraide, to whom it was evident that the young man thus addressed evinced, by the

boldness of his glances, something more than good will to find her a place, pinched Gennaro to keep him quiet, but it was too late. Fanfulla went up, took her by the hand, pulled her out into the open space behind the stages, and, with a cudgel, made the populace give way. Then he looked up to see where he could place her.

In the best place, on the highest tier, settled very comfortably, with his knees apart and arms crossed over his bosom, sat revealed (for his sins) the Constable of the tower of Santa Orsola, Martin Schwarzenbach. Not for a thousand ducats would Fanfulla have missed meeting him on such terms! With his stick he could reach the German's heel, which was about the height of a man and a half from the ground. Feeling it gently tapped, he looked down to see who wanted him. Fanfulla carelessly lifted his hand to his forehead, and moved his fingers downwards with a slight turn of the head to one side; then signalling

at the same time with eye and mouth, he gave him to understand that his place was wanted for the woman under his charge; leering at him, the while, in a manner calculated to rouse even the dead to ire.

As Martin was in an elevated position, he thought himself quite safe, and with a vivid recollection of his damaged wine-barrel, he only shrugged his shoulders impatiently, as much as to say, "Take yourself off"; and resumed his previous attitude.

"German! German!" exclaimed Fanfulla, shaking his head and raising his voice, "you will draw down a thrashing on yourself; anyhow, you may consider that you have seen as much of the jousts as you are likely to do to-day."

Martin did not stir; he only muttered something in an undertone, for he felt that his adversary, though at a distance, was not to be trifled with.

No sooner said than done. Fanfulla sprang

on to a beam that went across, seized the Constable from below by the legs (he, taken by surprise, could offer no resistance), jerked him off his seat, and dragged him down, expecting that he would fall on the ground; but poor Martin remained jammed between two planks through which he was too corpulent to pass, and began to cry out, "Mercy! help!" The other continued to give pulls and shoves and shakes, and was not satisfied till the poor man lay sprawling on the earth, covered with bruises and scratches; then he said jeeringly to him:

"I am heartily sorry for it; but did I not tell you that you had already seen the jousts?"

Thereupon, he speedily put up Gennaro and Zoraide, and disappeared in the crowd, laughing at the torrent of abuse showered on him by his victim, who, after setting himself to rights, and feeling if he had any bones broken, picked up his hat, sword, and gloves, and strove to efface the marks of his discomfiture.

Meanwhile, Zoraide, who, from the seat pro-

cured for her by Fanfulla's victory, had an excellent view of the whole amphitheatre, cast her eyes round and fixed them on the balcony opposite where she caught sight of Ettore sitting among the principal barons beside Donna Elvira, conversing with her, and endeavouring, by his polite attentions, to prove himself worthy of being her chosen squire for that day. The warm-hearted, excitable, and somewhat volatile Spanish maiden was, perhaps, nothing loth to interpret these attentions in a sense flattering both to her heart and *amour propre*. Not a gesture of theirs was lost on two women, who, far apart, and prompted by totally different motives, took a deep interest in their *tête-à-tête*. One was Zoraide, who, too far off to hear their conversation, was yet so engrossed in watching every movement, that she could not fail to realise that Consalvo's daughter fully appreciated the valiant Italian, and regarded him with something more than the good will of

courtesy. She dared not speculate on Fieramosca's sentiments, but a sorely wrung heart, such as hers, is apt to tremble at a shadow. The other was Vittoria Colonna who knew, by experience, how little the youthful Elvira was ever on her guard against the seductions of a handsome face and honeyed words. She felt a real and deep affection for her friend, and it was evident, judging by her severe countenance and penetrating glance, that she was uneasy at the confidential nature of their discourse, and anxious as to the consequences.

The first bull that entered the ring had been assigned, as sport, to the populace. Many had in turn attacked it with varied success, but none had succeeded in bringing it to bay. At length Diego Garcia, yielding to the entreaties of the French barons, who occupied a side box in company with several Spaniards and Italians, descended into the arena to give a sample of his dexterity in that sort of contest. Now-a-days, the matador's skill consists in driving the

sword into the joints of the neck vertebræ, at the moment that the bull lowers its head to toss its foe; but in those times, when the handling of heavy weapons developed the strength of the arm, it was considered a better stroke to cut the bull's head clean off with one blow; and this was often accomplished by those who combined any considerable amount of skill and vigour.

Paredes, dressed in a jacket of buffalo hide, bareheaded, with his good two-handed sword held over his left shoulder, seeing that the bull had already been wounded and was losing blood, beckoned to the attendants, and desired a fresh one to be brought. A lasso was thrown over the one that had been already engaged, and it was led out.

Instantly on the opening of the pen, out dashed a still larger and more ferocious steer, which, emerging from darkness into daylight, goaded and excited, began to bound about the ring (as those animals usually do), till, catching

sight of its antagonist, it stopped short in front of him, lowering its head and roaring, with its tongue protruding out of its mouth; then, as though impatient to commence the fray, it drew back, and scattered with its fore feet the sand all over its neck and hind quarters. Garcia's strength was enormous; it would, however, have been overweening confidence on his part to pit it against a bull with an incomparably thick, muscular neck, and armed with immense horns. The Spaniard saw that he must go cautiously to work. With both hands he raised his sword over his left shoulder, and with his right foot stamped two or three times on the ground, while he cried out "Ah! ah!" The bull, horns down, rushed on its foe. Just avoiding being caught, he sprang on one side, and brought his sword down with such force and good fortune, that the head rolled on the ground as the body staggered forward two or three paces before falling prostrate.

A general burst of applause greeted Diego Garcia, who resumed his seat amongst his friends. The French knights, unaccustomed to this sort of spectacle, seeing with what ease the Spaniard had cut off the bull's head, thought it must be a very easy matter. As they were men in the prime of life and strength, well versed in the use of arms, they declared they could do the same. The one who was most disparaging in his remarks was La Mothe, who, as we know, had been Garcia's prisoner, and who had ransomed himself. Haughty by nature, he still owed Garcia a grudge; not that he had received any bad treatment at his hands, but simply because it was a new experience to him to be worsted; and the sight of the man who had inflicted this stigma on him was galling in the extreme.

He praised Garcia's stroke in order not to appear envious or discourteous, but stood up with a self-sufficient air, and half turned away,

in his usual supercilious style, as he called out in patronising tones, "Bravo, Don Diego! well done, *par Nôtre Dame!*" Then turning to his French neighbour, he said, smiling:

"*Grand meschef a été que le taureau n'eût pas sa cotte de mailles; la rescousse eût été pour lui.*"

Paredes heard him, was nettled at the remark, and muttered, "I should like to see if this French dog's teeth are as long as his tongue!" Thereupon he approached, and said to him:

"How many golden ducats will you wager that I cannot sunder a bull's head from its body, even if it be protected with mail? I'll bet you could not do it, even if its neck were *bare*. And putting aside the question of ducats (for I do not wish it to be thought that Diego Garcia has any idea of being paid like a *torero*) let our sole stake be honour and glory; and we will see if you can imitate my stroke as easily as you sneer at it."

La Mothe was not best pleased at this defiance, and bit his lip for having provoked it; not from cowardice, for he was a bold and excellent swordsman; but having never before been called upon to encounter such a beast, he did not very well know how to set about it. However, there was no help for it. With so many eyes upon him, it was impossible to refuse; so he answered audaciously:

"It would certainly be no reflection on a French knight if he were to decline to engage a bull; but it shall never be said that Gui de la Mothe refused to strike a blow in any cause soever. Now for the trial." He rose, spitefully muttering, "*Chien d'Espagnol, si je pouvais te tenir sur dix pieds de bon terrain, au lieu de ta bête!*" He had attentively watched and well studied Garcia's way of executing his splendid stroke: young, a man-at-arms, and moreover a Frenchman, how could he be diffident of his powers?

The novelty of this challenge created great

excitement amongst the youth present. The occupants of Consalvo's box noticed the commotion, and soon ascertained the cause, which was bruited like wild-fire all over the amphitheatre, and hailed by the multitude with favour and delight. True, the news, passing from mouth to mouth, suffered strange transformation, all the more curious, as it circulated through the lowest classes of the people. The point where Zoraide was sitting, being the furthest in the whole amphitheatre from Consalvo's balcony, was precisely where the news arrived simultaneously, in its most mangled condition, from both sides. Its progress along the tiers of spectators was traceable by the general surging of heads and turning of faces, in the anxiety of the most distant to obtain information from those nearest at hand. Gennaro was afoot betimes, with outstretched neck, and bursting with impatience to learn something. He, Zoraide, and their neighbours had seen the commotion in the box occupied by

the knights and chiefs, and had watched the former issue forth and disperse throughout the arena. The fête seemed to be interrupted; no fresh bull made its appearance; everybody was asking, "What has happened? What is the matter?" without being able to obtain an answer. At last some one suggested: "The challenge is going to be fought out now between the French and Italians in this stockade." "Oh, that 's not likely," said another; "don't you see Fieramosca over there, looking as though he were glued to his seat? so wrapt up as he is in that girl, his thoughts must be running on something else than fighting." Zoraide heard and sighed. A third one turned round from the other side: "They say the French captain has challenged Consalvo; and whichever kills the bull from Quarato will be adjudged victor in the war and be master of the kingdom."

In this interval, several men, who were bustling about the sheds, seemed preparing to

let out another bull. In one corner stood Diego Garcia with his broadsword on his shoulder, surrounded by a knot of friends who appeared to be all talking at once, and with great eagerness, as though trying to dissuade him from something; but, towering as he did above the rest, his intrepid countenance attested, even to those at a distance, his set purpose of fulfilling what he had undertaken, however great the risk. At a little distance stood La Mothe beset by his countrymen, who were urging him not to disgrace them.

Meantime, a looker on seated on the lowest tier, having just finished talking to Veleno who was next him, said, turning round to Gennaro: "This worthy man says that those gentlemen below want to make a bet about emptying a bottle of Greek wine, without drawing breath, while facing the bull." This nonsense raised a laugh, which subsided as soon as the sergeants, directed by Fanfulla, were seen to be clearing the piazza in which the Spanish

giant remained alone and motionless, with his enormous sword on his shoulder.

Well aware that, in spite of his herculean strength, it would be by no means an easy task to cut off a bull's head, in a creditable manner, through iron mail, and that it was, to say the least of it, a very rash venture, he provided himself for this second encounter with another sword much heavier than the first, and which he was only in the habit of using for the assault or defence of trenches. Running home, he had ground it to a somewhat less sharp edge; had hurriedly taken a little refreshment, swallowing whatever came first to hand, and washing it down with a good flask of Spanish wine. For these preparations he had plenty of time to spare; for both *that* and not a little trouble were required to bind round a bull's neck a coat of mail, thrust its horns into the sleeves, draw the open fronts tight and fasten them below the throat, while the collar fell forward over the forehead. Anyone

who, in our days, has witnessed a wild bull hunt, knows that, by means of strong ropes round the horns, and confinement in a dark place, it is possible to keep them quiet, and do what is wanted with them.

At the sound of the trumpets and other instruments, a king-at-arms advanced, habited in a red and yellow jacket, on the front and back of which were emblazoned the arms of Spain. He made a signal with his mace for silence, and proclaimed aloud:

"On the part of the Catholic King, Ferdinand, King of Castile, Leone, Granada, West Indies, &c., Don Gonzalo Hernandez de Cordova, Marchese d' Almenares, Commendator, Knight of the Order of San Jago, Captain, Governor for his Catholic Majesty of the Kingdom beyond Faro, prohibits all here present, under penalty of two cuts with a rope, or more at his good pleasure, to disturb by shouts, signs, or otherwise, the fight between the bull in armour and the illustrious and magnificent

knight Don Diego, Manrique de Lara, Conte di Paredes."

The trumpets gave an answering blast; and the spectators of all classes maintained a death-like silence—some actuated by courtesy, knowing that on one step more or less on the part of the bull might depend the life of the intrepid Spaniard; others from fear of the lash: indeed, the prevailing hush was so great, that when the pen was opened, the creak of the bolt was the only sound to be heard throughout the immense crowd, from one end to the other of the amphitheatre.

The bull came out, but not with the furious rush of the others. It was smaller, short, thick-set, and entirely black, but much more savage. It stopped within ten paces of Don Garcia and glared at him, lashing itself with its tail and pawing up the sand. Its foe, with uplifted sword, kept a wary look-out, for he knew that a first ineffectual blow might prove fatal to him. The beast, at last, made a move;

slowly at first, then with a roar it made a sudden onset. Don Garcia, thinking to behead it like the last one, sprang aside, and let his blow fall with great force; but either the bull made an unfortunate swerve, or else the sword did not fall true on its edge, for it rebounded from the coat of mail, and the brute turned on him with such fury, that the Spaniard had barely time to keep it off by directing the point of his sword against its forehead, where it was protected by the collar of mail. Now was displayed Paredes' immense power. Steady as a rock, with one leg in advance of the other, and his sword grasped in both hands, the pommel resting against his chest, and the point fixed in the bull's forehead, by sheer strength he held it at bay; the strong, thick blade was equal to the strain; and so great was the tension on Don Garcia's muscles that, especially in his legs and thighs, they might be seen to swell and quiver no less than the veins in his neck and temples. His com-

plexion became first red, then almost purple, and he bit his lower lip till the blood came.

The bull, seeing that that form of attack was futile, drew back, and, taking plenty of room, bounded on him with redoubled fury. Don Garcia felt burning with shame at his failure. Once, when he turned his eyes towards the boxes, there flashed before him La Mothe's face set in a scornful smile. This glimpse roused him to such a state of frenzy, and endued him with such unwonted strength, that raising his sword as high as he could reach, he brought it down with such force on the bull's neck, that not even brass, much less flesh, could have withstood the shock. In consequence of his excitement, the blow did not fall straight. It first cut one horn off, clean as a reed; then penetrated through the mail and vertebræ, and stopped at the skin of the dewlap by which the head still continued fastened to the body which fell prone in the dust.

At the sight of this incredible feat, there broke forth such an universal storm of loud and instantaneous applause that it sounded like a clap of thunder. Paredes dropped his sword at his feet, and stood panting for a few seconds, while the flush on his face faded, but not for long, to the pallor of reaction. A triumphal burst of music celebrated his victory, and speedily his friends crowded round him with congratulations, examining, amid the chorus of admiration that ensued, some his sword, others the gaping wound and cleanness of the cut.

The Spaniard had fulfilled his engagement. Now it was La Mothe's turn. His antagonist's splendid stroke raised some debate in his mind. He could not hope to match it. If, as was very doubtful, he succeeded in cutting off the bull's head with its neck bare, still he would not have earned the same meed of praise; and even that exploit, his experience warned him, was likely to be beyond his powers. Anyhow, it was evident to him that he could not get out

of his scrape with much credit to himself, and the annoyance he felt made him quite beside himself.

When the Spaniard went to ask him if he would descend into the arena, he replied insultingly in the negative, and added, that French cavaliers excelled all others in the world in handling the lance, and that, as nobles and knights, they were ready to fight and vanquish their peers in legitimate warfare; but that they left the art of killing bulls to peasants and butchers; so he had better take himself off and provoke him no further.

Diego Garcia returned these brutal words with interest. Both clapped their hands to their swords. At this *fracas*, which took place in the knights' box, Consalvo, the Duc de Nemours, and all the spectators turned round; and to make a short story of it, another challenge was the upshot. Garcia, his pride aroused, defied the French, and offered to fight them on horseback, and prove that also thus, the

Spaniards were not merely their equals, but even their superiors.

The captains of France and Spain saw with pleasure the martial spirit of their armies kept up and increased by these rivalries which seemed, in those latter days, to revive the romantic deeds narrated by poets and troubadours. They, therefore, granted permission for this trial of skill, and in a few minutes the number and names of the warriors were settled, and it was arranged that in two days' time they should contend, ten on each side, along the coast on the Bari road. But one stipulation was laid down, viz. that no further allusion should be made, that day, to the quarrel, so as not to mar the enjoyment of the fêtes. The knights, on both sides, shook hands in token of satisfaction, and all quietly resumed their seats.

During these proceedings, the men in charge of the piazza had removed the body of the last bull, and, by sprinkling sand and sawdust

over the spot where it had fallen, had effaced all traces of blood. Fanfulla, who directed them, received orders from Consalvo to prepare for the tournament. In the middle of the arena a wooden partition was quickly erected, resembling a panelled wall, supported by stakes which fitted into previously-bored holes. It extended the whole length of the piazza, like the axis which crosses two foci of an ellipsis; and in height it might have reached to an ordinary man's shoulder. The two ends did not quite touch the circumference, leaving under the stage an aperture sufficiently wide for three horses abreast.

According to this style of jousting with blunted spears, two knights would take up a position at the opposite extremities, so that the palisade was between them and on the right hand of each. Just shaving it, they would put spurs to their horses, start off in a gallop, and tilt at one another in passing. This was the least dangerous mode, because

the horse's course was clearly indicated, as well as the point where the knight would meet his opponent. At each end of the piazza was placed an open cask filled with sand, bristling with spears of all sizes, which the combatants could pull out as they passed, when, having shivered a lance without any decisive advantage on either side, they rode round at the rear of the stockade and turned about to encounter one another again; each on the side which in the preceding charge had been occupied by his adversary.

When all was in readiness, Fanfulla advanced to the foot of the box in which Donna Elvira was sitting, and told her that it devolved on her to give the signal. She threw her handkerchief into the arena. At the same moment the trumpets gave a flourish, and immediately the three Spaniards who had undertaken to keep the field entered, and offered to all comers three trials of skill with lance and battle-axe. They were equipped in highly polished armour,

and the sumptuousness of their embroideries, plumes, and other decorations was quite a sight to behold. The champions were Don Luis de Correa y Xarcio, Don Inigo Lopez de Ayala, and Don Ramon Blasco de Azevedo.

The herald, after advancing and proclaiming these names, forbad, as was customary, all spectators to manifest open partiality to either side by word or deed. The Spaniards' shields were hung up below Consalvo's box with their names inscribed in letters of gold; while they, after riding round the piazza, took up their station near a large standard, bearing the towers and lions of Castille and the bars of Aragon, and which, upheld by a richly dight herald, unfurled itself, and flapped in the air over his head.

The victor's prize was to be a richly chased casque, with, for its crest, a silver Victory holding in one hand a golden palm, and supporting with the other the plume of the helm; the workmanship of Rafaello del

Moro, an excellent Florentine artificer. It was set up on the point of a lance fixed in the ground, close to the entrance which had given admittance to the three Spanish barons.

Bayard, the honour and mirror of chivalry, was the first to appear in the lists, mounted on a splendid Normandy bay, with three white legs and a black mane; the fine points of the steed were, according to the custom of the period, concealed by the ample caparison that covered it from its ears to its tail and which was dyed of a light green shade crossed with vermillion bars, with the knight's coat of arms embroidered on the shoulder and flank, and finished off at the bottom with trappings which reached to the horse's knees. From headpiece and crupper fluttered bunches of feathers of the same colours which were reproduced in the bandrol on the lance and in the plume on the helmet. There was nothing remarkable about the knight's structure; on the contrary, as far as could be judged, sheathed as he was

in armour, it did not give the idea of possessing the ordinary vigour of swordsmen of that epoch. He advanced, showing off the paces of his charger which, lightly touched by the spur, and restrained by the curb, curveted and caracoled along, inclining from side to side its arched neck and hind quarters, whisking about its flowing tail and switching up the sand.

He stopped opposite Donna Elvira, and, after saluting her, lowered his lance and struck three blows on Inigo's shield with it; then transferring it to his left hand which already held both shield and bridle, he took hold of the battle-axe that hung from his saddle-bow, and with it twice struck Correa's shield. This meant that he challenged the first to splinter three lances, and the last to try two rounds with the battle-axe. After this defiance he returned to the entrance of the amphitheatre.

Inigo was stationed at his post opposite, and they faced one another with their lances in

rest. Bayard, who hitherto had kept his vizor raised (displaying an extremely pallid face which made everybody wonder that he either would or could fight that day), desired his squire to lower and close it, and remarked to him that, in spite of the ague to which he had been a victim for the last six months, he was confident he should not bring disrepute on the French arms.

At the third blast of the trumpet both the warriors and their horses seemed animated by the same spirit. Simultaneously they bent over their lances, dashed in their spurs, and, rapid as lightning, started on their career with equal fury and impetuosity. Inigo first aimed at his adversary's casque, a fatal though by no means easy stroke ; but just before closing, he thought that, in the presence of such an assembly, it would be better to attempt something in which he could not fail, and so he contented himself with breaking his lance against the shield. The French knight, who,

perhaps, was the most expert man of his times in the practice of arms, aimed so full and sure at Inigo's vizor, that he could not have dealt a truer blow if they had been stationary. Sparks flew from the helmet, the lance shivered at two arms length from the butt end, and the Spaniard reeled over so much to the left, on which side he lost a stirrup, that he seemed on the point of falling off. Thus Bayard carried away the honours of this first passage of arms.

The two champions continued their course to wheel round and meet on the other side; and Inigo, testily throwing down the stump, snatched up another lance as he passed by.

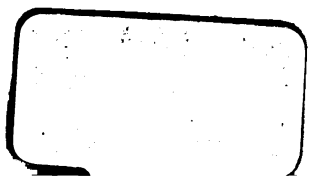
In the next trial no positive advantage accrued to either side; and Inigo in his heart began to have misgivings as to whether, through courtesy, the French knight were not refraining from bringing his whole skill into play. At the third encounter this doubt became certainty. Inigo splintered his lance

full in his adversary's face; the latter merely grazed his cheek with the iron tip, and it was quite evident that the slip of the weapon was not involuntary.

Loud brayed the trumpets and vociferous was the cheering, as the heralds proclaimed the valour of the combatants to be on a par, and together they proceeded to Donna Elvira's box to salute her. She greeted them with compliments on their prowess; neither were Consalvo nor the Duc de Nemours sparing in their compliments, the latter remarking to the champions, "*Chevaliers, c'est bel et bon.*"

Inigo was one of those who might be beaten in anything else, but never in generosity. He therefore alluded to Bayard's courteous act; but the latter, with the modesty that always accompanies merit, resolutely denied it. This competition in courtesy elicited from Consalvo the observation, "Your words, Sir Knights, may lead us to doubt which of you has run the best tilt; but at any rate there can

be no doubt that in generosity and nobility of mind you are both of you surpassed by none."

END OF VOL. I.

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